

The Gift of Mrs. Keller

to
Elinth Welton.

1788.

P O E M S

A N D

E S S A Y S,

BY THE LATE

MISS BOWDLER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



P O E M S *Sc*
A N D
E S S A Y S,

BY THE LATE
MISS BOWDLER.

VOL. II.
THE FIFTH EDITION.

PUBLISHED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE GENERAL
HOSPITAL AT BATH.

Vattene in pace alma beata & bella!
Vattene in pace a la superna fede,
E lascia al mondo esempio di tua fede!

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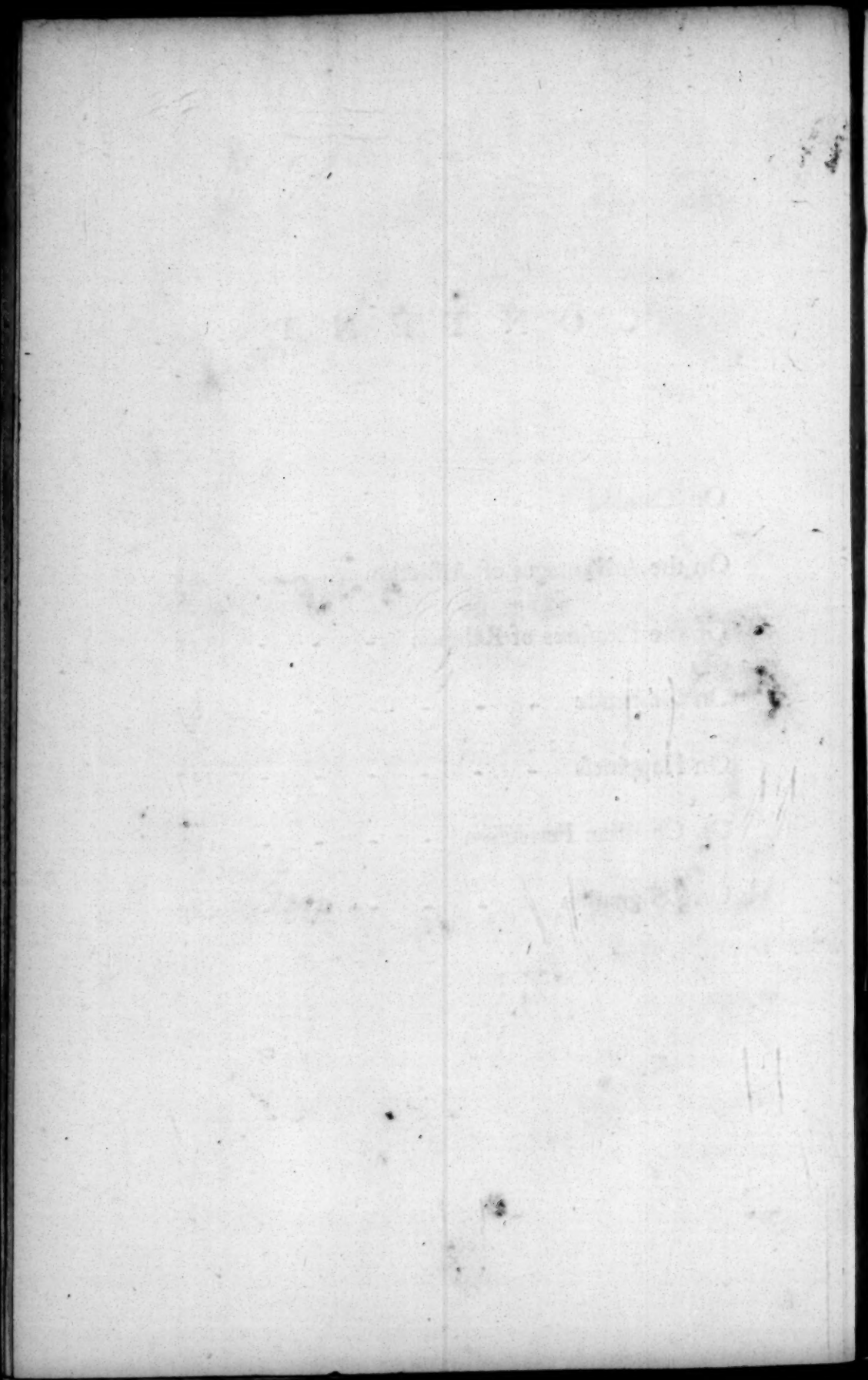
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ESSAYS.

ON

CANDOUR.

THERE are many people who take the measure of a character like the taylor in Laputa, who, in order to make a suit of cloaths for Gulliver, took the size of his thumb, and concluded that the rest was in proportion: they form their judgment from some slight circumstance, and conclude that the rest of the character must be of a piece with it.

VOL. II.

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Were all bodies formed according to the exact rules of proportion, this method of taking the measure would be infallible, supposing the taylor perfectly acquainted with those rules; but in order to find the same certainty in this method of judging of characters, we must not only suppose, that the person who is to judge of them is equally well informed of all the different variations; but we must also suppose, that the same motives regularly produce the same actions, and that the same feelings are always expressed in the same manner. A very little observation is sufficient to shew that this is far from being the case.

Human nature, it is said, is always the same. But what is human nature?—and who could ever enumerate all its various powers, inclinations, affections, and passions, with all
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the different effects they may produce by their different combinations, the objects on which they may be employed, and the variety of circumstances which may attend them?

This leaves a wide field for imagination to exert itself. But attention and observation might serve to perplex and make us diffident of our own judgment; and as it is much easier, as well as more flattering to vanity, to judge from a first impression, than from reason and reflection, a favourable or unfavourable prejudice is apt to take the lead in the opinions formed of the actions of those about whom we are much interested. Where this is not the case, most people measure by a certain line of their own, beyond which they know not how to go; and when they meet with refinements of which they are incapable, they can form no idea of them in

another; and therefore, by assigning some other motive to such actions, they reduce them to their own standard; and being then able to comprehend what was unintelligible before, they conclude that their present opinion must certainly be right, and form their judgment of the rest of the character according to it.

From these, and many other causes which might be assigned, it appears, that there must always be great uncertainty in the opinions we form of the actions of others, and in the inferences we draw from particular actions concerning the general character. The obvious conclusion from which is, that we should be always upon our guard against forming an hasty judgment, or laying too much stress upon those judgments which we cannot help forming; and be very cautious
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that we do not suffer our own prejudices and fancies to acquire the force of truth, and influence our opinions afterwards.

Yet still, whilst we live in this world, and converse with others, it is impossible to avoid forming some opinion of them from their words and actions; and it is not always easy to ascertain the just bounds within which this opinion ought to be confined, and to distinguish between the dictates of reason, and those of prejudice and imagination.

Since then we cannot shut our eyes, it may be useful to us to procure as much light as we can; not that we may be continually prying into what does not concern us, but that where we cannot avoid forming some judgment, we may do it with justice and candour; that we may learn to avoid being positive,

where we must be uncertain; and to see and confess our error, where we may have been wrong.

A benevolent heart, ever desirous of considering the actions of others in the most favourable light, will indeed be less liable than any other to the bad consequences which may follow from the difficulties attending on our judgments of others: for an error on the favourable side is far less pernicious to them, or to ourselves, than the contrary would be; yet every error is liable to bad consequences. The person who has formed an hasty favourable judgment, may probably in time be convinced of his mistake: having been deceived, he may grow suspicious, till every appearance of good is mistrusted, and he falls by degrees into the contrary extreme: for error cannot be the foundation of real and
lasting

lasting good, since, sooner or later, it must be shaken; and then the superstructure, however beautiful in appearance, will fall to ruins.

True Charity and Benevolence certainly do not consist in deceiving ourselves and others; they do not make us blind and insensible, nor do they give a false light, to lead us astray from the truth, and then leave us bewildered in darkness and error, seeking in vain to return, and mistrusting every appearance of light which would conduct us back again. Like all other virtues, they flow from the Source of Eternal Truth; they must be firmly rooted in the heart, and continually exercised in every different situation, not merely the transient effects of spirits and good-humour, which sometimes make a person disposed to be pleased with others, only because he is pleased with himself; for then
he

he will be displeased again, with as little reason, whenever the present humour gives place to another. Still less are they the effect of weakness of judgment, and want of discernment and penetration; which, in fact, are more likely to lead to the contrary extreme.

That they are sometimes considered in this last point of view, may perhaps be one of the chief reasons for that want of them, which so often appears in general conversation.

The vanity of displaying superior talents is very prevalent, and it is often much more from this principle, than from real ill-nature, that the faults and imperfections of the absent are exposed. To gain admiration is the object of pursuit: any other way by which it might be attained, would answer the purpose just as well; but unfortunately
all

all others are more difficult, while this is within the reach of all; for the weakest have penetration enough to discover imperfections in those whose excellencies are far above their reach,

Those who have no solid virtues of their own may assume a temporary superiority, by declaiming against the faults of others; and those who have neither wit, nor any talents to amuse, may yet raise a laugh by exposing what is ridiculous, or may be made to appear so. A little more of that penetration which they are so desirous of being thought to possess, might help to a farther insight into themselves and others; they might perhaps find that they have only been exposing what was obvious to every body, and gaining the reputation of ill-nature, in fact without deserving it, (any otherwise than by inattention;)

tion;) for admiration was their point in view; and it is very possible that the consequences of what they said, might never enter their thoughts; and that they would have been really shocked, had they considered them in their true light. But raising themselves, not depreciating others, was the object of their pursuit; and the means of attaining it were considered merely as such, without any attention to their consequences.

Perhaps some rigid censor, who heard the conversation, may fall into an error of the same kind with their own; and, for want of sufficiently penetrating their motives, may suppose them lost to all sense of candour and benevolence, and actuated solely by malice and ill-nature; while a person of real discernment would have avoided the errors of both; and not from weakness, but from strength of judgment,

judgment, would have acted a more charitable part; for nothing is more just than the observation of an excellent author: "Ce
" n'est point au depens de l'esprit qu'on est
" bon." The faults and follies are often the most obvious parts of a character, while many good qualities remain unnoticed by the generality of the world, unless some extraordinary occasion call them forth to action.

It is wonderful to observe, how many unfavourable and unjust opinions are formed, merely by not sufficiently considering the very different lights in which the same action will appear to different persons on different occasions. How many things are said in general conversation, from thoughtlessness and inattention, from a flow of spirits, and a desire to say something, which will not stand the test of a severe censure, and which, considered

sidered separately, may appear in such a light as the speaker never thought of! Not only the ill-natured, but the superficial observer may often be misled by such appearances, and shocked at things which want only to be understood in order to secure them a more favourable judgment,

The disposition of the hearer, as well as that of the speaker, may also contribute greatly to make things appear different from what they really are; and great allowances should be made for his own passions and prejudices, as well as for those of others; for though they may be supposed to be better known to him, yet it is evident that every one, while under their immediate influence, is very ill qualified to judge how far they may affect his opinions.

A person

A person who is under any particular dejection of spirits, and feels that a kind word or look would be a cordial to his heart, may be overcome by the mirth of a cheerful society, and inclined to attribute to insensibility what perhaps was merely owing to ignorance of his situation, and the lively impression of present pleasure: while another, whose heart is elated by some little success which his imagination has raised far above its real value, may be shocked at the coldness of those, who, being more rational and less interested, see the matter in its true light, and therefore cannot share in his joy in the manner he expects and wishes.

What multitudes of unfavourable and unjust opinions would be at once removed, if we could put ourselves in the place of others, and see things in the light in which they appear

pear to them,—the only way of forming a right estimate of their conduct in regard to them. But while we judge of the actions of others by our own feelings, or rather by our own reasonings, upon what we choose to suppose would be our feelings on the like occasion, we must be liable to continual mistakes.

To feel for others, is a quality generally claimed by all, and which certainly in some degree seems to be implanted in human nature. They must be insensible indeed, or something far worse, who can see others happy, without being pleased; or miserable, without sympathizing in their sufferings, and wishing to relieve them. But to enter fully into the feelings of others, to be truly sensible of the impression every circumstance makes in their situation, is much more difficult, and more uncommon, than at first sight may appear;

pear; and yet, unless we could do this, there must always be great uncertainty in our opinions of their conduct: and it may afford no small satisfaction to a person of true benevolence, when he feels the pain of being obliged to think unfavourably of another, to consider at the same time, that if he knew all, he might find many reasons to abate the severity of the censure which he hears pronounced by others, and to which he is unable to give a satisfactory answer, because, according to appearances, it seems to have been deserved.

Most people act much more from their feelings, than from reason and reflection;—those who consider coolly of circumstances in which they are no way interested, may lay a plan of conduct which may appear to them so rational and natural, that they wonder how any one could miss it; while those who are engaged

engaged in action, are often hurried on by the impulse of the present moment, and, without having any bad intention, may fall into such errors as the cool reasoner would think almost impossible; or perhaps sometimes, without considering the matter, they may rise to heights of excellence which would never have occurred to him, and which, for that reason, he may probably be unable to comprehend, and therefore very liable to misinterpret.

It may generally be observed, that in every science a slight and superficial knowledge often makes a person vain and positive; while long and attentive study, and a deep insight into the real nature of things, produce a contrary effect, and lead to humility and diffidence. This may be partly owing to that desire of displaying what they possess, which

is

is often found in those who possess but little, and are therefore ambitious of making the most of it, in order to impose upon the world by false appearances, and prevent a discovery of that poverty which they wish to conceal; but it is also often owing to a real misapprehension of things.

The superficial observer considers the object only in one point of view, which perhaps is new to him, and therefore strikes his imagination strongly; and it does not occur to him that it may be considered in other lights, and that, upon farther enquiry, he might find reason to change his opinion, or at least to doubt of what at first appeared to him clear and evident. Pleased with what he has acquired, and ignorant of what farther might be acquired, he is satisfied and positive; while those who are farther advanced, see a vast

field of knowledge open before them, of which they are sensible that they can explore only a very small part; and by taking an enlarged view of things, and observing how often they have been deceived by considering them in a false light, are taught to avoid being positive, where they are sensible their knowledge is imperfect.

This may be applied to the study of the human heart, as well as to every other, in which we can only judge from appearances. Those who know least are often most ready to decide, and most positive in their decisions; and positiveness generally gains more credit than it deserves. The consequences of this are perhaps more pernicious in regard to this subject than any other, because it requires much less penetration to discover faults and weaknesses, than real and solid good qualities,

From

From hence may appear the injustice of supposing, that persons of deep knowledge and observation of mankind are to be avoided, as being inclined to pass the severest judgments on the conduct of others. Those indeed who harbour any criminal designs, and conceal vice under the mask of hypocrisy, may tremble under the eye of a keen observer; for such an one may see through their deepest disguises, and expose them in their true light when it is necessary, in order to prevent the mischief they might do. He may also detect the fallacy of an assumed merit, and false virtue, which have passed upon the world for real; but he will see at the same time the allowances which candour may make for every fault and weakness. He will discover many an humble excellence which seeks not to display itself to the world, and many an instance of true goodness of heart, and delicacy of senti-

ment, expressed in trifling circumstances, which would pass unobserved, or perhaps be totally misinterpreted, by a person of less observation and knowledge of mankind. He will also be more open to conviction, and ready to acknowledge a mistake, because he is not under the necessity of endeavouring to impose upon the world by a false appearance of knowledge, which always indicates a deficiency in what is true and genuine.

Ignorance alone pretends to infallibility. A person of real knowledge is sensible that he must be liable to error, and has not the same reason to be afraid of acknowledging it in any particular instance; and if his knowledge be joined with true benevolence, he will be continually watching for an opportunity to change his opinion, if that opinion has been formed on the unfavourable side, or at least

least to discover some good qualities which may counterbalance the fault he could not help observing. For the same reasons, he will be always ready and willing to observe an alteration for the better in those of whom he has thought most unfavourably, instead of being glad (as is sometimes the case with others) of any new instance which may serve to confirm the opinion formerly pronounced, and afraid of any thing which may contradict it. He will always remember, that the worst character may improve; and the severest judgments ever pronounced by the ignorant and ill-natured, even those which have been assented to with regret by the sensible and benevolent, may afterwards be changed: but the first will be afraid and unwilling to acknowledge, that they have been obliged to change their opinion; the last will be ever ready to do it, and not

ashamed to own it, when they can observe a change of conduct.

Knowledge is indeed quick-sighted, but ignorance is improperly represented as being blind; it rather furnishes a false light, which leads into a thousand errors and mistakes. The difference between them does not consist in the number of their observations, but in the truth and justness of them. Penetration may discover those faults and weaknesses which really exist, but ignorance will fancy it has discovered many which never existed at all; and it is difficult indeed to convince ignorance of a mistake.

It may also be observed, that those qualities which dispose us to make a right use of the knowledge of mankind, contribute at the same time to increase that knowledge.

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The heart which is merely selfish does not understand the language of benevolence, disinterestedness, and generosity, and therefore is very liable to misinterpret it; while those who feel themselves capable of great and worthy actions, will find no difficulty in believing that others may be so too, and will have an idea of a character which can hardly ever be perfectly understood by those who feel nothing like it in themselves.

Vice, even in spite of itself, must pay a reverence to virtue, considered in general; but the most exalted heights, and most refined instances of it, are far above its comprehension.

This observation holds not only in regard to such characters as are entirely abandoned to vice, but to all the lesser degrees of it; which

which always, more or less, tend to inspire suspicion, and make it difficult to understand an opposite character, or believe it to be such as to an honest and good heart it would immediately appear.

It is impossible to read or hear the observations of those who are celebrated for the deepest knowledge of mankind, without being hurt to observe that vice and folly, with the means of playing upon them, and making advantage of them, are made the general objects of attention; while true goodness of heart, and rectitude of character, are hardly ever mentioned. And yet, if such things can exist, (and what must his heart be who believes they do not) he who leaves them entirely out in his account, must have but an imperfect knowledge of mankind.

Another

Another way in which a flight and superficial knowledge of mankind is very apt to mislead, is that love of reducing every thing to general rules, which is always found in those whose views are not very extensive. A few such rules are easily remembered; and they have an appearance of conveying a great deal of knowledge at once, which often procures them a favourable reception, not only from those who are desirous of concealing their ignorance under an appearance of knowledge, but even from such as might be capable of detecting their fallacy, if they would give themselves the trouble of examining them.

To say that all men act from pride, self-interest, &c. and then to explain every action accordingly, is much easier than to trace the motives of different actions in different characters,

ractions, and discover the various sources from whence they spring; and this is much more flattering to vanity, than to acknowledge ourselves unable to explain them.

A general rule, which has been found to answer in some instances, is a most valuable acquisition to those who talk more than they think, and are more desirous of the appearance of knowledge and penetration, than of the reality; and such rules are often repeated from one to another, without being sufficiently examined, till they gain the force of truth, and are received as maxims, which it would be thought unreasonable to controvert.

The necessity of using metaphorical language, to express the sentiments of the heart, may perhaps often have given occasion to mistakes of this kind; the qualities which
belong

belong to the literal sense of the word are applied to it when used metaphorically; and from a habit of connecting the word with those qualities, such reasonings often pass current, though a little attention might easily have discovered the mistake on which they are founded. This is still more likely to happen when the same metaphor is used to express different sentiments, which from the poverty of language upon such subjects must sometimes happen.

The words *warmth* and *heat*, (for example) originally denoting the properties of fire, have been metaphorically used to express those of affection, and those of anger or resentment. This circumstance alone has probably given rise to an observation often repeated, and very generally received, "that a warm friend will
" be equally warm in his anger and resent-
" ment,

"ment, and consequently will be a bitter
"enemy." It would be just as rational to
say, "he will burn your fingers;" for it is
only from reasoning upon words without
ideas, that either the one or the other can
be asserted.

That tender affectionate disposition, which
constitutes the character of a warm friend,
and disposes him even to forget himself for
the sake of the object beloved, is not more
different from the qualities of natural fire,
than from that proud and selfish spirit which
inspires violent anger and resentment. To
the first, (according to the expression of an
elegant writer) "*la haine seroit un tour-*
"ment;" but the last finds his satisfaction (if
that word can ever be applied to such a cha-
racter) in the indulgence of his hatred, and
the endeavour to express it.

A very

A very little attention to the real qualities of these characters, might surely be sufficient to shew that they are widely different; though the habit of using the same words to express them, has led to an habitual connexion of the ideas, and prevents this difference from striking us at first sight.

The same would be found to be the case in many other instances, where general observations have been received, merely because they sound plausibly, and are repeated so often that they are believed of course, without enquiring into the truth and justice of them. And when such are made the ground work of the judgments formed in particular instances, those judgments must be liable to numberless errors, which will easily gain ground, because they favour a received opinion.

That

That this method of judging by general rules, on subjects so various and complicated as the dispositions of the human heart, is very liable to error, should alone be sufficient to put us on our guard against it; but there is an additional reason for this, from the probability that they may be founded on observations drawn from the most unfavourable views of human nature; the effects of bad qualities being, in general, more extensive and more apparent than those of good ones; since the last are frequently employed in preventing mischief, and they are scarce ever taken notice of. They also make the deepest impression; for all are sensible of the evils they have suffered; few pay sufficient attention to those they have escaped.

Whenever, therefore, the application of a general rule disposes us to an unfavourable
judgment

judgment in any particular instance, that circumstance should render it suspected, and make us less ready to admit the conclusions which may be drawn from it.

This again may serve to shew, that persons of enlarged views and extensive knowledge are far from being on that account disposed to be severe; but on the contrary, if they make a right use of them, will thereby be enabled to correct the errors of others, and be led to a more candid and liberal way of judging than the rest of the world.

They cannot indeed retain that disposition to think well of every body, which is sometimes found in those who are just entering into life, and know not how to suspect any insincerity in words, or bad design in actions: this belongs only to youth and inexperience,
and

and therefore cannot last long in any one. A little knowledge of mankind must destroy the pleasing illusion, and shew a world far different from what the imagination of an innocent and benevolent heart had represented it.

Such a discovery is unavoidable. That there are vices and follies in the world must be evident to all who are not quite strangers to it; and there can be no dependance on a favourable opinion founded on ignorance, and which time must destroy. It is when this ignorance is dispelled (as it must be) that the prospect of the world is opened before us, and opinions are formed upon observation; and then the worst parts of it, the consequences attending vice and folly, are in general most exposed to view, while a greater degree of attention and penetration is necessary,

fary, to discover the humble excellence, and secret influence of virtue; to convince us that actions are often far different from what they appear to be, that our judgments of them must always be uncertain, and that therefore reason and justice require us to be very diffident of them; while candour teaches us to make every allowance which the circumstances of the case (according to the best view we are able to take) can admit; and charity gladly cherishes the hope that we might find reason for many more, if we were able to look into the heart.

But while we admire this candid and liberal way of judging, which belongs to an enlarged mind and a benevolent heart, we should at the same time be careful not to confound it with a false kind of benevolence, which sometimes assumes the appearance of

the true, and tends to produce very pernicious effects. This is, when *faults*, not *persons*, are made the objects of what is called good-nature; and excuses are found for them, (considered in themselves) not for the persons who are, or appear to be, guilty of them.

To justify, or even palliate vice, is inconsistent with truth, and beneath the dignity of virtue; and therefore can never belong to real candour, which is exercised on the circumstances of the person, not on the crime itself.

It is by no means improbable, that many may have fallen into errors of this kind with very good intentions, deceived by an appearance of indulgence towards others, which gratifies their good-nature; but such should
remember,

remember, that whatever tends to lessen the horror of vice, must be a general injury to all mankind, for which no advantage to particular persons can make amends; and perhaps few are sufficiently sensible, how greatly the progress of vice is promoted by the softening terms so generally used in speaking of it, and the favourable light in which it is so often represented. By such means the mind by degrees grows familiar with what it would have considered as an object of detestation, had it been shewn in its true colours; and none can say how far the consequences of this may extend.

Others again are led into this way of judging by their own interest, and are glad to find excuses for what they are conscious of in themselves, and to shelter their self-indulgence under a pretence of indulgence

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towards

towards others. It is even possible that they may impose upon themselves, as well as the world, by this method of proceeding; and may persuade themselves that the favourable judgments they pronounce on their neighbours, are really the effects of true benevolence.

Self-indulgence is not the only bad effect which is likely to follow from hence; for others, who observe their sentiments and conduct, and are sensible of the bad consequences they are likely to produce, may from thence be disposed to run into a contrary extreme, and to believe that a superior regard to virtue is shewn, by being very severe in their censures upon the conduct of others, and condemning without mercy all those who appear to be in any degree blameworthy.

But

But it should always be carefully observed, as a great and discriminating character of true candour, by which it may be distinguished from all false pretences, that the motives by which it teaches us to be indulgent towards others, are such as cannot have that effect when applied to ourselves, if we should ever indulge ourselves in those faults which we condemn in others.

We cannot see their hearts, and know their motives; and it is very possible that many an action which is generally condemned, might, if all the circumstances were known, appear to be really deserving of commendation. Perhaps they could explain it, and clear themselves from the blame thrown on them, but are restrained from doing it by consideration for others; or some other good and charitable motive, which

makes them willingly submit to the censure they might avoid, and dare to do right, not only without the support of that approbation which should be the consequence of it, but even when they know it will expose them to the contrary.

Perhaps from real and unavoidable ignorance of circumstances which are known to us, they may have been induced to consider the matter in a very different light, and with very good intentions may have done what appears to us unjustifiable.

From such considerations as these, it will often appear, that what would be a fault in our situation and circumstances, is really far otherwise in those of others, or at least may be so, for ought we can possibly know to the contrary.

But

But even where there is no room for any considerations of this sort, and where we cannot doubt that what we condemn was really a fault, still the case is widely different between the faults of others, and our own. Their error might proceed from ignorance, prejudice, misapprehension, and many other causes, which he who condemns it can never plead in his own excuse, if he should be guilty of the like. They may have been hurried on to act without reflection; but he who observes and censures their conduct, cannot pretend that this is the case with him. They may not have been aware of the consequences which would attend their actions; but he who sees them, and condemns the cause of them, may surely be upon his guard against it. After the greatest faults, and the longest deviations from what is right, they may become sensible of their errors, and re-
form

form their lives; but he who dares wilfully to indulge himself even in the smallest fault, with a view to this, will find his task become continually more and more difficult, and has little reason to expect that he shall ever accomplish it.

Thus reason and justice teach us to be candid, by shewing us how very uncertain our judgments on the actions of others must always be; and how many circumstances, with which we cannot possibly be fully acquainted, may contribute to alleviate their faults, though they cannot have that effect in regard to our own. They teach us to check that pride which would decide upon every thing, and exalt ourselves at the expence of others; to be sensible that there are many things of which we cannot judge; and that the smallest deviation from what is right, is inexcusable
in

in ourselves, though the greatest (for ought we know) may admit of many excuses in the case of others.

But true charity goes farther still. It shews us in all mankind our brethren and fellow-creatures, for whom we should be truly and affectionately interested. It teaches us to grieve for their faults, as well as for their sufferings; and sincerely and earnestly to wish their welfare, and endeavour to promote it.

He who sees the faults of others with real concern, will not be inclined to aggravate them, nor can he delight to dwell upon them.

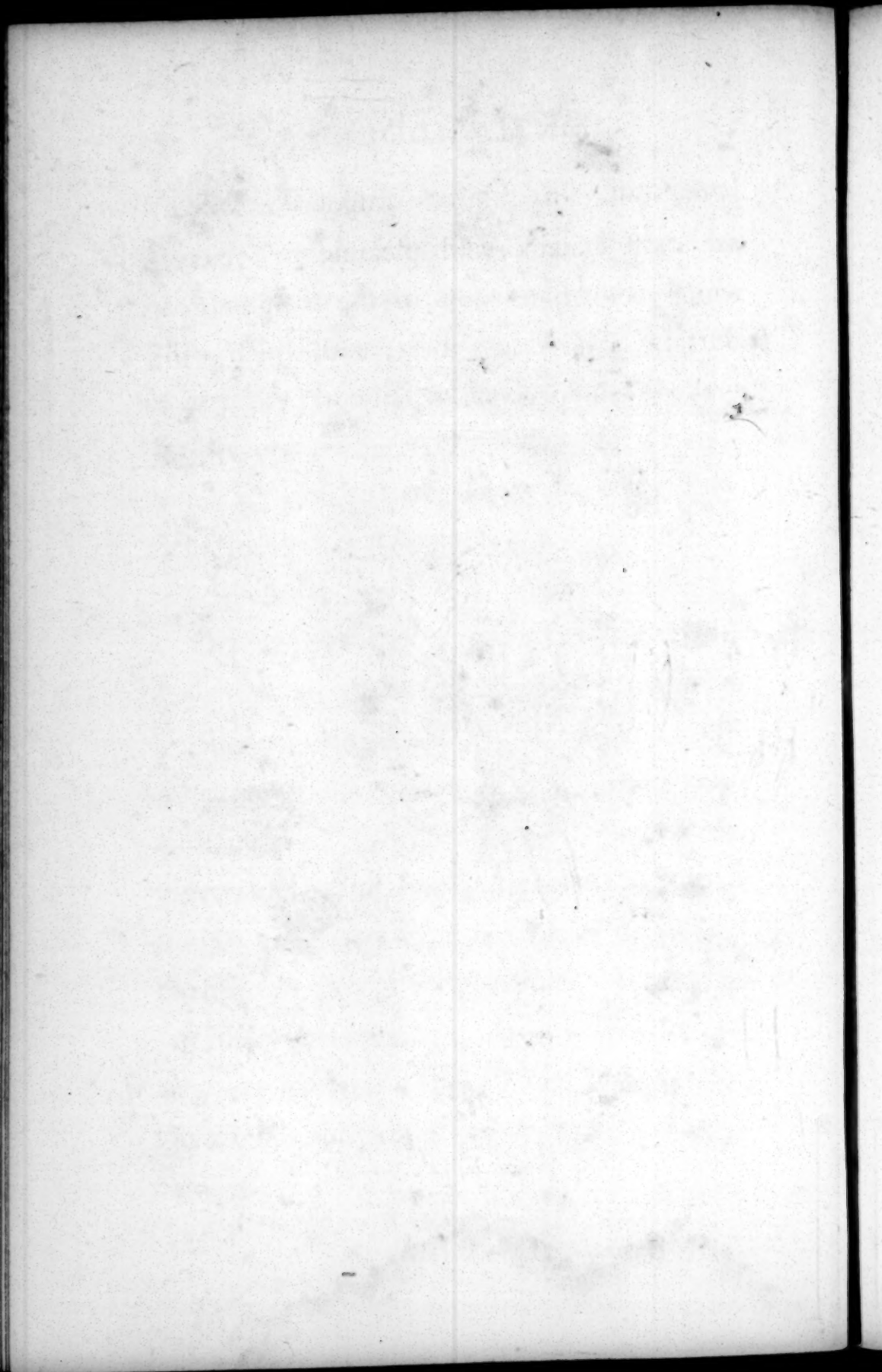
He who enjoys all the good he sees, will naturally wish to see all in the most favourable

vourable light, and that *wish* will contribute greatly to enable him to do so. It will extend even to those by whose faults he is himself a sufferer; far from being desirous of revenge, he will grieve for the offender, in this case as in every other, and endeavour by the gentlest means to bring him back to what is right.

Our passions may oppose what reason and judgment approve; and without being able to silence them, may yet often prove too strong for them: but that charity which religion inspires, must be firmly rooted in the heart. It exalts the affections to the highest object, and subdues the excess of passion by nobler and stronger inclinations. It extends its influence over the whole character, and is expressed in the most trifling conversation as well as in the most important actions. It
is

is the source of all those dispositions which are most amiable and pleasing in society, which contribute most to the happiness of ourselves and others here, and which will make us infinitely happy hereafter.







ON THE
ADVANTAGES
OF
AFFLICTION.

IT is the advice of the Wise Man, "In
"the day of adversity *consider*;" and it
may well be reckoned one of the advantages
attending on the afflictions we meet with in
this life, that they call off our attention from
the too eager pursuit of business or pleasure,
and force us for a time to turn our thoughts
another way. When the disappointment of
some

some hope we eagerly pursued, or the loss of some blessing we highly valued, has deeply impressed upon our mind the sense of our own weakness, and of the uncertainty of every earthly joy; then surely the importance of some never-failing support, some durable felicity, must strike us in the strongest light. Then, if ever, it behoves us to look into our hearts, to recal them from those transitory pleasures to which they were too much attached, and endeavour to fix them on hopes which are not liable to disappointment, and joys which nothing in this world can take away; and to discover and pursue those means by which we may obtain a rational and well-grounded enjoyment of such hopes, and be prepared for such felicity.

Those who enjoy a large portion of the good things of this life, will often find it very
difficult

difficult to avoid growing too much attached to them, and (at least in some degree) inattentive, perhaps even indifferent, in regard to another. To such, it is evident, the stroke which calls them back, however severe it may be, is indeed a blessing, if received as it ought to be. But those who are placed in a different situation, may sometimes stand no less in need of such a monitor; their pleasures being fewer, they may learn to set a higher value upon them; and feeling continually the want of comfort and support, they may be apt to rest too much on such as are afforded them, and forget where alone they must seek for true and lasting comfort.

Present objects make a strong impression; and even those who appear to have the least reason to be attached to this world, may yet stand in need of some powerful call to awaken
their

their attention, and raise their thoughts to a better. But no affliction can have this effect, if we immediately fly to pleasure and dissipation, and endeavour by such means to drive it from our thoughts, and render ourselves insensible to it. This method may perhaps succeed in some degree, or appear to do so, for a time; but the affliction must be trifling, or the disposition little inclined to feel, if such methods can destroy the impression it has made. Where the heart has received a real wound, it can never be healed in this way; it will bleed afresh in every solitary moment, and in spite of all our endeavours to take off our attention, it will tell us in secret that this is not the comfort which it wants; and thus the sorrow will remain in its full force, but without the advantages which might be derived from it.

If

If death has snatched away an affectionate and virtuous friend, how unworthy must they have been of such a blessing, who can really drive away the remembrance of it, and find comfort for such a loss in the thoughtless hurry of trifling amusements? Yet those who abandon themselves to a hopeless sorrow, who cherish their affliction, and sullenly reject all comfort, will run into an extreme no less dangerous, and destructive of every good and useful end which affliction was designed to answer.

Let us then endeavour to seek better resources, and arm ourselves with more firm and lasting comforts.

Whenever it pleases God to deprive us of a pious and valuable friend, we may easily suppose it is not only for the advantage of

the deceased, but for ours also; since every affliction that happens to us may certainly, if rightly used, be conducive to our eternal salvation. Let us humble ourselves under the afflicting hand of the Almighty; but let not affliction make us forget his mercies. Let us thank Him for the blessings we have enjoyed; and let us also thank Him for making our afflictions the means of recalling us to Himself, when our affections were too apt to wander from Him, who is the giver of every good we can enjoy or hope for. To Him let us pour forth all our sorrows with filial confidence, and beg that assistance and comfort which can never fail, and will never be denied to those who sincerely seek for them. Let us acknowledge our own blindness and weakness, and sincerely resign our will to his, even in the most painful sacrifices, with the fullest conviction, not only of that wisdom
and

and power which preside over the universe, but also of that mercy and goodness by which even the minutest concerns of our own lives are directed, and which would permit no affliction to come upon us but for our greater good.

Let every blessing we are deprived of in this life, serve to raise our affections to a better, where all our joys will be permanent, and eternally secure; where not only heavenly joys are laid up in store for us, but even our dearest earthly treasures will be restored to us; and where we may hope that we shall again enjoy them, without any of those fears and sorrows, those weaknesses and imperfections, which in this life will throw a damp over even our highest pleasures.

Let us not then endeavour to calm our sorrow for our departed friends, by driving them from our remembrance. To those who felt a real and ardent affection, the effort would be vain; nor can we suppose it the design of Providence that we should do so. Such strokes are given to force us to reflect: and friends removed to a far more exalted state, if we think of them as we ought, may be the most affecting monitors imaginable, and their remembrance may prove a most powerful incitement to every thing that is truly good and worthy.

The opinion that friendship lives beyond the grave, is most soothing to the afflicted mind; and both reason and scripture seem to countenance it. The thought that some sort of intercourse may be still permitted; and that while we continue in this imperfect
state,

state, it is possible that they may be allowed to minister to us for good by means unknown to us, is pleasing; and as we have no assurance of the contrary, it is hardly possible to avoid indulging it.

This indulgence, if kept within due bounds, is surely innocent, and may even be made useful to us; but then we should remember, that friendship in such beings must be free from all those weaknesses with which, even in the best, it will be attended in this imperfect state. Though the same affections may still remain, they must be exalted and refined beyond what we can at present form any idea of: they may still be watching over us with an affectionate and anxious concern, still tenderly solicitous for our real welfare, and rejoicing at every advance we make in piety and goodness: but enlightened by

a clearer and more extensive view of things, they can no longer grieve for sufferings which will prove blessings in the end, or rejoice in prosperity, which exposes us to dangerous trials.

Let us consider what such a friend would say, if he could speak to us now.—How good, how pious, would he wish us to be! How trifling would he think the pursuits which are apt to engage so much of our attention! How powerfully would he preach to us the vanity of all terrestrial enjoyments; and with what ardour would he excite us to exert every faculty of our soul, in endeavouring to fit ourselves for those joys on which time and death can have no power. If he could feel a pain amidst the happiness in which he is placed, would it not grieve him to see us indulging our affliction for his
loss,

loss, (or any other passion) so far as to make us, in any degree, negligent in our duty, and forgetful of that God who has bestowed such joys on him, and has reserved the same in store for us if we do not forfeit our title to them by our own fault?

If ever we wished to give proofs of our affection to our friend, and desire to contribute to his happiness, let us remember, that the only way in which we can do this, is to live as we are sure he would wish us to do, if he were still a witness of our conduct; and for ought we know he may be so. By these means our remembrance of him, far from stopping us in our course, will prove an incitement to every virtue; and the sense of present sorrow will raise the mind to future joy, and add new vigour to all our efforts in the attainment of it.

Fortitude

Fortitude does not consist in being insensible to the afflictions which come upon us in this world; but he who, when his heart is pierced with sorrow, can still love his God with unabated fervour, and submit with entire resignation to his will;—who can struggle with his affliction, and resolutely persist in a constant endeavour to perform all the duties of his station;—that man acts with real fortitude; and when the time shall come that all his trials are drawing towards a conclusion; when from the brink of the grave he looks back on the various scenes of his past life; those seasons of affliction, which once appeared so severe, will then be what he can recollect with the greatest satisfaction; and the remembrance of them will afford him solid consolation, when all the little pleasures of this world are vanished and forgotten.

May

May these thoughts be; deeply imprinted
on my heart! May every affliction be re-
ceived as it ought to be, and then it will in
the end prove a blessing!





ON THE
PLEASURES
OF
RELIGION.

IN the days of health and ease, in the hurry of business and pleasure, our thoughts are often carried away from those objects which ought chiefly to employ them; and it may require some effort to call them off from the pleasing allurements of present objects, to others which appear to be placed at a distance; though such thoughts might give a far higher relish to every innocent pleasure, even at the present hour.

Happy

Happy indeed are they, whose present pleasures are so enjoyed as to be made the means of obtaining everlasting happiness!— But when a change of circumstances affords more leisure for reflection; when by sickness, affliction, or any other cause, the pleasures and pursuits of life are interrupted; these excuses can no longer be pleaded: and far be it ever from those who by such means are in any degree separated from the world, to judge unfavourably of those who are more engaged in it, or value themselves upon an opinion that they have attained an higher degree of excellence. Their situations are widely different, and much may be said to excuse the errors of the thoughtless and dissipated, to which the others could have no claim if they should ever fall into the like. Let them rather examine the state of their own minds, and observe whether pain does
not

not too often produce the same bad effect with pleasure; and whether they do not suffer their thoughts to be too much engaged by present evils, instead of raising them to what may afford the best of comforts, and the brightest hopes.

It seems strange that it should be difficult to do this; yet all who have been in such situations must probably at some time have found it so, and felt themselves inclined to dwell on every painful circumstance, though they can only aggravate them by doing so, and have no temptation of pleasure to plead in their excuse, for they well know that such thoughts can only give them pain. But here we alledge, that our thoughts are not under our command;—and it is very certain that they are not entirely so, especially when the spirits are depressed, and the mind less capable

capable of exertion than at other times. Yet even on such occasions, if something we truly valued were proposed as the object of our pursuit; if we could express our gratitude to some kind benefactor, or our affection to some much-loved friend; we should be disposed to exert ourselves, and, however little our power might be, our thoughts would be still engaged; we should be desirous of doing all we could, and regret that we could do no more; for where our affections are truly fixed, our thoughts and our efforts will be employed.

How many, by such considerations, have been rendered superior to sufferings, though not less sensible of them than others! Something which engages our affections more strongly than present ease or pleasure, can make us willing to sacrifice them; and what-
ever

ever could always do that, would be a never-failing support under the loss of them; and such are the comforts which Religion offers; the love of an All-gracious Father,—the kindness of an Infinite Benefactor,—the support of an Almighty Friend! Here our best affections may be for ever exercised, and for ever satisfied; and on the exercise of our best affections, must all our happiness depend: for what is happiness but the enjoyment of our wishes; that is to say, of the objects of our affections?

But perfect happiness is not the lot of this life. To be constantly advancing towards it, continually aiming at it, and continually successful in that aim, is the utmost we can hope for here: and this we may enjoy in every situation of life, when our affections are placed on the Highest Object: but we can
never

never enjoy it constantly or securely, while they are fixed on any other. Are we afflicted? Our greatest joy remains. Are we disappointed? Our dearest hope cannot be taken away. Are we wounded by unkindness? Our Best Friend will comfort us. Are we oppressed by pain and difficulties? Our Almighty Helper will support us. Are our good intentions misrepresented, and our best actions misinterpreted? He who sees the heart will do us justice. Are we neglected and forsaken by the world? HE who made and rules the world is ready to receive us, and never will forsake us. Is every sorrow heaped upon us, and every earthly comfort snatched away? The best of comforts yet remains, and an eternity of happiness awaits us.

How happy must be the situation of a rational creature, exerting all his powers for
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the best and noblest purposes, performing all the duties of his station, and making continual advances towards the perfection of his nature; depending with humble confidence on the divine assistance to support his weakness, and constantly and sincerely endeavouring to do the will of his Heavenly Father; who watches over him with far more than fatherly affection,—who orders all events as shall be really best for him,—accepts his endeavours,—forgives his imperfections,—and leads him through all the various paths of life to everlasting happiness!

How delightful is the thought, that we are indeed the objects of HIS love and favour; that all events which can befall us may be made the means of good; that we may flee to HIM as to a tender and faithful friend, in all our sorrows, in all our trials, and be cer-

tain of that comfort and assistance of which we stand in need!

This surely is Happiness: and this may be enjoyed in every situation in which we can be placed in this world, for it is totally independent on outward circumstances. All that the world most values can never bestow it, nor afford true and lasting satisfaction without it; nor can the greatest afflictions ever take it away. If then, in the time of pleasure and success, we feel that something still is wanting to complete our happiness, and find our enjoyments disturbed by the dread of losing them; or if in the time of affliction we are ready to sink beneath our burden; when we are inclined to be dissatisfied or dejected; instead of giving way to such dispositions, let us think of the happiness of the state we have been describing, and ask ourselves,

selves, if such be really the picture of our situation? If it be, our pleasures may be enjoyed without anxiety; and in the midst of every trial, we may say with confidence, "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my Salvation;" and such joy "no man taketh from you." Affliction may be felt, human weakness may overcloud our joy for a time; but they cannot destroy it; superior to them all, it will constantly overbalance, and in the end entirely conquer them.

But if this be not our situation, then let us ask ourselves why it is not so? For this happiness, great as it is, may certainly be attained by all. If then we do not enjoy it, what is the hindrance?—It is vain to plead the weakness and imperfection of our nature; for more than is in our power will never be required. By doing the best we can, we may

secure the favour of our GOD; our weakness will be assisted, and our imperfections never laid to our charge.

Does the remembrance of our past faults deprive us of our happiness? It need not do so, since through the merits of an All-gracious Redeemer, the greatest will be forgiven, if we repent and forsake them.

Does the sense of our present imperfection, and the consciousness of faults which we frequently fall into, prevent our enjoying it? Let us lay our hand upon our heart, and candidly examine whether it be, or be not, in our power to remedy that imperfection, and avoid those faults? If it be, let us immediately and resolutely set about a work of the utmost consequence to our present and future peace;—for certainly, if we can wilfully offend

send our Maker even in the smallest instance, or neglect any means of expressing our love and gratitude to Him, those sentiments are not felt by us as they ought to be, nor can they produce the happiness we aim at. If this be not in our power, yet if we really and sincerely exert our utmost endeavours, then what we lament is mere human weakness, the sense of which should never destroy our peace; for what we *could not* avoid, will never be imputed as a fault; and involuntary errors and imperfections need not deprive us of our confidence and hope: but then we must be sure that they are involuntary.

And here indeed doubts may arise, to which even the best must often be liable in this imperfect state; for it is by no means sufficient that we do not offend deliberately, and with the free consent of the will. If we

find ourselves continually falling into the same faults, however little they may appear in themselves, this certainly gives reason to suspect some inclination still prevailing in our hearts contrary to that which ought to be the leading principle of every action; and such an apprehension ought indeed to awaken our attention, and engage us to exert our utmost diligence to trace the cause of such faults, and sincerely endeavour to root it out, whatever pain the sacrifice may cost us: for we shall by no means form a just estimate of our state, if we judge of it only from our sentiments in the hours of solitude and reflection. The unguarded moment must also be taken into the account, and may often afford a much clearer insight into the heart, too apt in many ways to impose upon us, and lead us to form a partial opinion of our own disposition and conduct.

But

But though such doubts as these should indeed excite our care and attention, and may often give pain even to those whose intentions are sincerely good, yet still they ought not to destroy their happiness; for it should always be remembered, that the thing required in order to that happiness is, to do the best we can, which certainly is always in the power of every one.

This consideration can afford no comfort to those who knowingly encourage themselves in any thing wrong, or who neglect to exert their endeavours to conquer their weakness, and improve their powers. But it is comfortable indeed to those who sincerely wish and endeavour to do their duty, but who are discouraged by a sense of their imperfections, and disposed to carry to excess those doubts which in a certain degree are the necessary
consequence

consequence of the frailty of human nature, and which are often increased by dispositions in themselves truly laudable; such as, humility, caution, an earnest desire of perfection, and very exalted ideas of it. Those whose notions of excellence are not raised very high, are generally easily satisfied with their attainments, and often proud of such things as would to others appear subjects for humiliation and distrust of themselves.

The humble and sincere Christian may rejoice in the thought, that the enjoyment of the best of blessings, the favour of God, and everlasting happiness, is in his power, and never can be forfeited but by his own fault. A diffidence of ourselves is indeed natural and reasonable, when we reflect on our past faults, our present weakness and imperfection, and the exalted purity at which we aim;
but

but this, while it checks every vain and presumptuous thought, and teaches us attention and humility, should yet never discourage our hopes, nor deprive us of our peace of mind. It is the sincere endeavour that is required, and will be assisted and accepted, and that is in the power of every one, in every moment of his life. Whatever is past, he may *now* form a good resolution, exert his efforts, and enjoy the happiness at which he aims: and this is a happiness peculiar to Religion alone.

Those who speak of virtue as its own reward, and dwell on the thought of the heartfelt satisfaction it must afford, generally represent to their imagination some exalted instance of it; they paint to themselves some extraordinary exertion of generosity, benevolence, &c. some hero who has sacrificed every
selfish

selfish consideration to the noblest motives, and exults in the thoughts of his triumph; or some illustrious benefactor, by whom numbers have been made happy, and who enjoys the happiness of them all. If they descend to private life, still they take the moment of some successful exertion of virtue—some distress relieved, some good bestowed; something, in short, which the heart feels, and which the heart, that is not lost to every generous and exalted sentiment, must feel with delight.

These are pleasures indeed; and those who sincerely seek for them, will probably enjoy much more of them than they might otherwise have imagined; but even such will find that many of these pleasures are placed beyond their reach, and that they cannot by any be constantly enjoyed.

To

To do great actions is the lot of few; and in common life, disappointments often attend the best endeavours. Poverty, sickness, or affliction, check the most active spirits, and confine their powers; or even where this is not the case, still those pleasing successful instances of virtue must depend on circumstances which human power is unable to command; and therefore, considered merely in themselves, they cannot afford a constant and never-failing source of happiness.

A great part of the lives even of the best of men must be spent in actions which do not afford pleasures of that sort; and though the delight which attends them is certainly a sentiment implanted for wise and gracious purposes, yet something more is necessary to furnish a happiness which may be enjoyed at all times, and in all situations.

Those

Those who have passed many days, and perhaps years, in constant and tedious sufferings; who by disease, the loss of any of their faculties, or any other cause, are rendered a burden to their friends; or perhaps are reduced to a state of solitude, and are not so happy to have any friends about them; whose utmost efforts can seldom attain to any thing farther than *lessening* the trouble they must give to others, and submitting with patience to the lot assigned them; such persons will not often find reason for that exultation of mind, which attends on active and successful virtue; but on the contrary, finding how little is the utmost they can do, they will be more inclined to be dissatisfied with themselves, and hardly able to reconcile themselves to a life in appearance of so little use.

Those who from the unhappiness of their
circum-

circumstances and situations are obliged continually to suffer from the faults of others; whose endeavours to please are attended with constant mortifications and disappointments; and who, by the daily sacrifice of their own inclinations, can do nothing more than lessen evils which they are unable to prevent or cure;—far from feeling the triumph of virtue, —will often be obliged to submit to the sufferings which should attend only on the contrary; and finding their endeavours unsuccessful, and their conduct frequently blamed, may be led to doubt whether they have not in some way given occasion to the humiliations which they suffer; and being unable to satisfy others, may find it difficult to be satisfied with themselves.

Even those who are placed in situations by no means so painful and discouraging as these,

these, and who meet with much more frequent opportunities of enjoying the satisfaction of successful virtue, must yet spend a great part of their lives in such actions as do not give occasion to it; but which, considered merely in themselves, would appear little more than indifferent, and often tedious and insipid.

The little compliances which duty and civility continually require, the employments of domestic life, and numberless other things which must take up a considerable part of the life of every one, and the omission of which would be highly improper and even blameable, can yet afford nothing of that heartfelt exultation which is supposed to be the attendant of virtue; and which certainly does attend it on many occasions, even where nothing further was considered than the present satisfaction.

But

But Religion, by exalting our hopes and efforts to the highest object, furnishes a new motive for action, which may extend its influence over every moment of our lives; it teaches us to exalt the most trifling actions into exertions of virtue; and to find, in the employments of every hour, the means of improvement in those heavenly dispositions which are necessary to our happiness both here and hereafter.

The tedious hours of suffering afford continual opportunities for the exercise of an affectionate and filial resignation. He who owns a Father's hand in every trial, far from complaining that he is rendered useless to the world, and deprived of the satisfaction he might have enjoyed in bestowing happiness, will be convinced that his situation is such as is really best for him; and submitting
patiently

patiently to all the humiliations which attend it, will find, in every pleasure lost, an occasion to exercise the noblest sentiments.

Those who are discouraged by mortifications and disappointments, should consider for whose sake they act; and directing all their efforts to please Him who never will reject them, will feel a strength of mind which nothing in this world could inspire; will bear for his sake whatever sufferings they may meet with from others; and resolutely persevere in the path of duty, though attended with no apparent pleasure or success. They will look up to heaven with humble, yet cheerful confidence, and remember that their task is assigned by Him, who only knows what trials are necessary to improve and confirm their virtues; and that while they do their best they are sure to be accepted.

The

The same disposition will extend its influence over all those actions which are generally considered as matters of indifference, or of small importance; things which are performed of course, and without any particular satisfaction, or are omitted without consideration of their consequences. The employments of every day and every hour, which are often more influenced by habit than by reflection, even when they are such as ought by no means to be neglected; the duties of our calling; the care of families; the little compliances which are required in society; the attentions of civility; every thing, in short, which it is right to do even on the most trifling occasions, should be done from the same principle which inspires the most exalted instances of virtue, directed to the same end, and will therefore be attended with a satisfaction of the same kind.

He who would be ready to resign his life, if his duty required the sacrifice, will from the same motive resign his indulgences, his pleasures, his inclinations, his vanity—every thing great or small, which the duty of his situation, and the present time, demand from him; and the dullest hours he is ever obliged to pass will be animated by the same spirit which is exerted in the most pleasing and active virtues. In all he will do his best, he will endeavour to conform to the will of his Heavenly Father, and express his love and gratitude to Him: and thus, in all, the most exalted sentiments will be exercised and enjoyed, the noblest efforts will be exerted, and the success be secure.

If then we find ourselves weary of the employment in which we are engaged, or feel the time hang heavy on our hands; let us
consider

consider whether we can employ ourselves in any thing better? If we can, let us embrace the opportunity, and be happy. If we cannot; if some dull and tedious way of spending our time, or merely patient and silent suffering, be what our present duty requires, (as must frequently be the case in the lives of all) then let us consider, that by submitting to it cheerfully, we do the best we can, and in so doing are always certain of the divine favour and acceptance; the gloom is dispelled, the time which before appeared almost a blank in life, now opens a wide field for the exercise of virtue; its pleasures are felt, and its hopes enjoyed.

Thus may the humble Christian, whose circumstances and abilities are most confined, and who has the fewest opportunities for the exercise of active virtue, still enjoy the hap-

pinefs which attends it; for to fuch, *that* happiness depends not on the fituation in which he is placed, but on the sentiments of the heart; he performs the task affigned to him, whatever the task may be, with the fame views, and with the fame alacrity; not repining that he cannot choofe his part, but endeavouring to improve to the utmoft that which is allotted for him, and to cultivate by continual exertion, in every different fituation in life, thofe difpofitions which may recommend him to the favour of his Maker, and fit him for that happiness which is the object of his hopes.

When by ficknefs, afflictions, or any other caufe, our fpirits are deprefsed; when the mortifications of fociety, the difappointment of our purfuits, and the little fatisfaction to be met with in earthly pleasures, incline us
to

to be weary of the world; let us take a view of it in another light, and consider it as what it certainly may be—the road to happiness, the prospect is changed at once, and the most painful life appears truly desirable.

We complain of the loss of some pleasure which we valued; but if all were taken away, that which alone can make this life truly valuable would yet remain, and we should still have reason to receive the gift with thankfulness, and pursue our course with joy.

Let us but pause a moment, and consider what it is to be able to say to ourselves—
“I shall be happy, perfectly and unchangeably happy, through eternity!”

We cannot indeed say this positively while we continue in our state of trial, but this we

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can say,—“I may be so:—it is in my power to be so;” not indeed from a dependance on our own strength, or a confidence in our own merits; but the strength of Almighty God is ready to assist our weakness,—and the merits of our Blessed SAVIOUR to atone for our imperfections:—and these we may obtain; for of these a voice from heaven assures us, “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.”





O N

G R A T I T U D E.

OF all the sentiments of the heart, there is hardly any which appears to be more natural and universal than Gratitude. One might, indeed, be almost inclined to suppose it the effect of instinct, rather than of reason, since we see such strong appearances of it, even in brutes. Wherever nature is not perverted, gratitude seems to follow kindness, as the effect follows the cause in any other instance. But amongst the refinements of polished

polished life, the voice of nature is often suppressed; and under the shelter of artificial manners, the selfish passions are indulged to excess.

Politeness, the expression of a delicate mind and a benevolent heart, is taught as an art to disguise the want of these qualities; and appearances take the place of realities, till the realities themselves are neglected, and almost forgotten. Perhaps if the busy and the gay had leisure to look into their own hearts, they might find that they possess more good qualities than they suspect themselves of; but fashion is the general guide, and even follies and vices, if they are fashionable, become objects of vanity, and are affected by those who have no title to them. Yet still, in the midst of all the variations of fashion and prejudice, the esteem due to gratitude is in some degree preserved,

preserved, and the want of it is a fault which no one would ever confess.

A disposition to pride, to anger, to ambition, to indolence, and many other blameable qualities, may have been acknowledged by many; but none ever confessed a disposition to ingratitude, and perhaps none ever was conscious of it: and yet, amongst all the complaints made against the world by those who, being out of humour with themselves, fancy they have reason to be so with every body else, there is hardly any one more universal than that of the ingratitude they have met with. Nor indeed is the complaint confined to such persons alone; for it must be owned, that even the benevolent heart will sometimes find but too much reason for it, and must feel in some instances what it would wish to conceal from all the world.

But

But such instances should not induce us to pronounce a general censure; and perhaps a more enlarged view of mankind might shew us, that the effects ascribed to ingratitude are often owing to some other cause, and that those who make the greatest complaints are in fact those who have the least reason for them, and have themselves given occasion to that ingratitude of which they complain, by expecting such returns as they have no right to claim.

Perhaps these complaints, in many instances, may be owing to the want of distinguishing sufficiently between that sort of gratitude which is paid as a debt, and that which is a sentiment of the heart. Every benefit conferred, according to its different degree, has a right to claim the first; a word or a look may inspire the last more than the gift of millions could have done.

These two kinds of gratitude are different in many instances, and may be entirely separated; but painful indeed is the lot of him who is reduced to *owe* the first, where he is unable to *feel* the last: for the first alone may be indeed a burden,—the last is always a pleasure; the first would be glad to return more than it has received, by way of discharging the debt,—the last would make every return in its power, by way of expressing what it feels, but would never wish to lose the impress. In short, the one is the return due to *benefits*, the other to *kindness*; the one may be claimed, and must be paid; but even to mention a *claim* to the other, would endanger the title to it.

That benefits alone cannot give a right to this sort of gratitude, will be evident, if we consider that it is a sentiment of the heart,
which

which is, and can be paid only to kindness, or the appearance of kindness; and benefits may spring from very different motives, in which perhaps the person on whom they are conferred has in reality no concern, nor ever was the object in view; they may be embittered by a thousand circumstances which may make it a pain to receive them; or even without these, they may want that kindness which alone can make it a pleasure to a delicate mind.

In the early part of life, when the sentiments have generally more vivacity than refinement, and before experience has taught the fatal art of allaying every pleasure by suspicion, these two kinds of gratitude generally go together. Every benefit is supposed to proceed from kindness, and is felt as such; and as all the benevolent affections of an innocent

nocent heart are attended with pleasure, they are generally at that time carried almost to excess. Every appearance of kindness is then received with warm and affectionate gratitude. Imagination bestows a thousand excellencies on the person from whom it comes; every thing is expected from the supposed friend, and every expression of gratitude seems too little to return the kindness received. Perhaps a little time discovers the deceit; the obligation is found to have proceeded from some motive quite different from what was imagined; and the person who conferred it sinks to a level with the rest of the world, and disappoints all the hopes which had been formed. The affectionate and grateful heart remains the same as before; but the object to which that affection and gratitude were addressed, is no longer to be found; it wishes to preserve the
same

same sentiments, and grieves that it is unable to feel them: but the apparent change proceeds only from the former mistakes. Probably there is hardly any person of strong sensibility who has not experienced mortifications of this sort; and ingratitude may often have been laid to the charge of those, whose only fault was, that they carried their gratitude, and their expressions of it, to excess, without sufficiently considering what grounds they had for it. Those who make the complaint might by a different conduct have preserved their claim, but complaints can never regain what they have lost; to expect it, would be to suppose that unkindness should produce the same effect as kindness.

Far be it ever from our thoughts to offer any excuse for real ingratitude. The person who is capable of it is a monster in nature,
whom

whom all agree to condemn, and all would wish to avoid. But the greater our horror of the crime, the greater should be our caution not to charge any with it unjustly; and greater care and attention are necessary never to give occasion to it.

Those who are so ready to complain of the want of gratitude in others, should examine their own hearts, and enquire whether they really have any right to that return which they expect;—whether true kindness was indeed their motive;—and whether they have not allayed the obligation by such circumstances as must destroy the effect of it, and leave no impression but a painful consciousness of owing a debt, instead of that heartfelt gratitude which enjoys the thought of it? While those who wish to inspire true gratitude, should consider the means by which it
may

may be gained ; and they are such as, more or less, are generally in the power of all.

To bestow considerable benefits, belongs indeed to few ; but that kindness which comes from the heart, and which the heart feels and returns, is totally independent on such circumstances. Without this, the greatest benefits may give pain ; with it, a trifle becomes important, and inspires true and lasting gratitude. For the exercise of this, numberless opportunities are continually presenting themselves in the daily intercourse of life ; and those who are attentive to take advantage of them, will hardly be wanting on greater occasions, either in doing acts of kindness, or in that manner of doing them, which changes an obligation from a burden to a pleasure. They can enter into the feelings of those they oblige, and are eager to spare

spare them every circumstance which may be painful; while those who act upon different motives, will expect more than they have any title to, and probably much more than they themselves would pay, if they could change places with the persons obliged; for the exclusive regard to *self*, which makes them complain so loudly of the ingratitude they have met with, would probably make them ungrateful in their turn, if they were to receive obligations instead of conferring them.

But while we are considering that benevolence of heart which should be the source of every act of kindness, and that delicacy of manners with which all such acts should be attended, (and indeed it is impossible to consider them in too strong a light) let us not however forget, that the want of these can by no means discharge the person obliged from

gratitude considered as a *duty*; that is to say, from as much as it is in his power to pay, for more than that can never be required.

Monfieur DU CLOS, in his ingenious and elegant effay, "*Sur les Mœurs*," has many excellent reflections on this subject, in which the duties of persons obliged are considered at large: (see chap. 16. *sur la Reconnoissance, & sur l'Ingratitude*.) He concludes with an observation well deserving particular attention, because it sets in a strong light the fallacy of an opinion which, like many others, has been too generally received without sufficient examination, merely because it sounds plausible. His words are these:—

" J'ai plusieurs fois entendu avancer sur ce
 " sujet une opinion qui ne me paroît ni juste
 " ni decente. Le caractère vindicatif part,
 " dit-on,

“ dit-on, du même principe que le caractère
“ reconnoissant, parce-qu’il est également na-
“ turel de se souvenir des bons & des mau-
“ vais services. Si le simple souvenir du
“ bien et du mal qu’on a éprouvé étoit la règle
“ du ressentiment qu’on en garde, on auroit
“ raison, mais il n’y a rien de si différent, ni
“ même de si peu dépendant l’un de l’autre.
“ L’esprit vindicatif part de l’orgueil, souvent
“ uni avec le sentiment de sa propre foiblesse;
“ on s’estime trop, et l’on craint beaucoup.
“ La reconnoissance marque d’abord un
“ esprit de justice, mais elle suppose encore
“ une ame disposée à aimer, pour qui la haine
“ seroit un tourment, et qui s’en affranchit
“ plus encore par sentiment que par reflexion.
“ Il y a certainement des caractères plus
“ aimans que d’autres, et ceux-là sont recon-
“ noissans par le principe même qui les em-
“ pêche d’être vindicatifs.”

This supposed connection between certain good and bad qualities, is an opinion we find often maintained, without being sufficiently examined; though probably, in most instances, it would be found directly contrary to the truth, as it has been shewn to be in this; and the consequences of such an opinion are often of much greater importance than may at first be imagined.

Pride, for instance, is generally said to attend on superior talents and attainments. In consequence of this opinion, how often do we see those who are destitute of both, affecting that vanity which they suppose to belong to them, and endeavouring to gain the reputation of superior excellence, by assuming the appearance of the fault which they imagine is connected with it; while those who possess the qualities which others would affect, are
continually

continually aspiring to greater degrees of excellence; and finding that their highest attainments always fall short of their wishes, even by those attainments are taught humility.

The same might be observed in many other instances. Virtue and vice, the amiable and unamiable qualities, are in their own nature opposite, and more or less tend to destroy each other, whenever they subsist in any degree in the same character; and perhaps the most effectual way of eradicating any bad disposition from the minds of young persons, is not so much by attacking it directly, as by endeavouring to cultivate those good qualities which are particularly contrary to it, and to give them a clear and just idea of those which they may have been led to imagine are connected with it.

To the truly affectionate and grateful heart, every opportunity of exercising those qualities affords real enjoyment: it cannot help seeking out for them, because from those feelings it must derive its greatest pleasures; without the exercise of them it cannot be happy. How then can it be so in exercising such as are contrary to them? A very little reasoning and reflection must surely be sufficient to convince any one of the fallacy of such an opinion; but to those who really *feel* that disposition to affection and gratitude of which others *talk*, all reasoning upon the subject must be unnecessary: those sentiments will be ever cherished; and notwithstanding the many mortifications and disappointments with which they may be attended, they will still, in some degree, carry their reward along with them. Our feelings are greatly influenced by our pursuits, and by those objects
which

which engage our attention. The person who is continually in pursuit of opportunities for exercising the benevolent affections, either by conferring or acknowledging kindness, will overlook a thousand trifling causes of offence which might have awakened resentment in the breast of another; while those in whom the selfish passions prevail, will be equally insensible to numberless instances of kindness which would have filled the hearts of others with gratitude and joy; just as a person who is eager in the chase will disregard the beauties of the prospect which surrounds him, and know no more of the country through which he passed than if he had never seen it.

But while the affectionate and grateful heart thus pursues and enjoys every opportunity of exercising those qualities, it must
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be owned at the same time, that they may lead to many mortifications and disappointments. Those who are eager to catch at every appearance of kindness, may sometimes be misled by false appearances; and those who are disposed to love all who have shewn them any kindness, may afterwards find that their affection has been misplaced.

To prevent such mistakes, as far as the observation of mankind and delicacy of judgment can do it, is certainly desirable; but to avoid them entirely, is perhaps impossible: and surely none would wish to avoid them by running into the contrary extreme, and losing all the pleasures attending on such dispositions.

It should however be observed, that this disposition to seek for obligations, relates to
kindnesses,

kindnesses, rather than to considerable benefits. Affection must precede the benefit, or at least must be engaged by the manner of conferring it, in order to make it a pleasure to a person of true delicacy. This does not proceed from pride; but because such a person, having a high sense of gratitude, is unwilling to contract an engagement to one he cannot esteem and love. To be unable to entertain those sentiments which might be thought due, would be to him a continual suffering; while one whose feelings are centered in himself, is glad to get what he wants at any rate, and gives himself no concern about making any return for it; or at least thinks he has done this very sufficiently by conferring some favour which he imagines to be equivalent to what he has received. Yet, in fact, a real obligation freely conferred on one who had no claim to it, and willingly received

received by him as such, can never afterwards be cancelled by any act of the person who received it, even though it should be in his power to return benefits far beyond what he has received; because, in one respect, they must always fall short of it: for the first benefit conferred was a free and unmerited kindness, to which the person obliged had no title; but no return can ever be such; and all that can be done in consequence of it, is still but a *return*, however it may exceed in other respects: so that the person who once acknowledges himself to be under an obligation, though he may not be bound to make all the returns which an unreasonable person may require, is yet bound for ever to acknowledge it.

This however relates chiefly to such obligations as are really conferred with a view to
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serve the person obliged. The case is different when one person is benefited by another merely from a concurrence of accidental circumstances, or when the benefit was conferred from ostentation, or with a view to gain some greater benefit in return. In these last cases indeed it seems a sort of bargain, in which the person who gains what he aimed at, has received his price, and has no reason to complain. Yet even in these, and indeed in every instance, the truly grateful will ever be ready to acknowledge the obligations received, in their various degrees, though the sentiments excited by such obligations are far different from those which are the return due to real kindness.

That gratitude may sometimes be a duty when it is not a pleasure, is but too certain; that from being a true and heartfelt pleasure,
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it may become a burden, is no less so; but the pleasure of self-approbation still remains to compensate these mortifications: and they must be insensible indeed who ever felt that pleasure while they were acting an ungrateful part, or who can be happy without feeling it.

The proud and selfish generally mistake their own happiness, and in no instance more than in this of gratitude. Those who know what it is to feel its tenderest and most refined sentiments, when the kindness of some friend, truly loved and valued, makes the heart overflow with gratitude and joy, and all language seems too weak to express what it feels, will be little inclined to envy those who are too proud to be obliged, and too self-sufficient to think they stand in need of any thing which the kindness of others can bestow. Even the little acts of kindness
attending

attending on the daily occurrences of life, afford pleasure far beyond *their* reach; for the intercourse of real kindness, and that gratitude which is its due return, whether expressed in the smallest or the greatest matters, is always attended with a heartfelt satisfaction on both sides; and they know little of their own interest, who from pride, insensibility, or inattention, neglect the opportunities, which, in a greater or less degree, are continually offering themselves for enjoying it.

But if the grateful heart experience such satisfaction in the sentiments excited by little and imperfect kindnesses, and paid to frail and imperfect beings, how exquisite must be the delight attending on that gratitude which is excited by Infinite Obligations, and paid to Infinite Perfection! No doubt can here intervene as to the motive which gave occasion to
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the benefit conferred. We had no claim on our Almighty Benefactor, and can make him no return: for we have nothing but what we have received. Here we can have no apprehension of carrying our love and gratitude too far, and being reduced to grieve for the faults and imperfections of those on whom they were bestowed, and from whom they cannot now be recalled. All is perfection of goodness, and all our love and gratitude must ever fall short of what we owe. No fears can here arise of a change of conduct, or that a friend and benefactor may cease to be such, and wound the grateful heart by unkindness and upbraidings; the same goodness will for ever continue, and our warmest gratitude be ever overpaid by new instances of that kindness which can never fail but through our own fault.

Religion

Religion to the truly grateful heart is a continual exercise of that virtue; and considered in this view, what a pleasure is diffused over the most painful trials to which it can ever call us!—

Our existence, with every blessing attending on it;—our redemption, with the hopes of peace and pardon secured by it;—and an eternity of happiness prepared for us hereafter;—are surely benefits sufficient to awaken gratitude in the most unfeeling heart! And can it be possible that those on whom a kind word or look can make an impression never to be effaced, should be insensible to benefits like these, or return them merely by a cold obedience, often paid unwillingly, instead of that warm and animated gratitude, which thinks it can never do enough to express what it feels?

Gratitude,

Gratitude, excited by real kindness, and joined with true affection and esteem, can never be a lifeless, inactive sentiment ; it will be continually seeking opportunities to express itself; it will consider every such opportunity as a valuable acquisition; and though it should be attended with pain and difficulty, it will find a satisfaction even in these, because in these it can shew itself most strongly. It will exert itself even in trifles, and be expressed in words and looks, though nothing farther should be in its power.

But when gratitude is raised to the Highest Object, the means of expressing it can never be wanting; every exercise of every virtue performed with that view will be accepted as such; and what a satisfaction must the grateful heart enjoy, from the thought of being continually employed in expressing its sentiments,
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by making such returns as the Almighty Benefactor requires, and will accept!

With this view, how earnestly will it seek for every means of doing good to others! With what patience and benevolence will it support every injury received, and endeavour by the gentlest means to bring back offenders to peace and goodness, instead of exasperating them by reproaches and upbraidings!

Considered in this view, how pleasing will every difficult exercise of virtue appear; and what a never-failing source of comfort and satisfaction will be found even in the severest sufferings to which human nature is liable! All may serve to express our gratitude; and to those who truly feel it, this must always be a pleasure. Nor need the meanest and the weakest ever be afraid that their humble

efforts will pass unnoticed. Earthly benefactors may be removed beyond our reach; and even when present, they are liable to be misled by false appearances, and may be often mistaken in the opinions they form of the gratitude they have met with; but He who sees the heart, will observe and accept the silent wishes of the truly grateful, when wishes only are in their power, for it is the gratitude of the heart which He requires; the means of expressing it depend on outward circumstances.

How happy then are they in whom these sentiments are warm and active!—for here gratitude is continually excited by new benefits; and here it may be indulged to the greatest height, without fear of excess, and without doubt of acceptance. The heavenly intercourse is continued through life. Religion,

gion, instead of being a restraint upon the inclinations, becomes an indulgence of them. Numberless instances of infinite goodness are discovered, which would escape the observation of the thoughtless and inattentive. The pleasure of gratitude is increased by every exercise of it; and new efforts are continually excited to make every possible return; efforts which must always be attended with a heartfelt pleasure, because they flow from a delightful principle, and are certain of success.

Thus may gratitude afford continual pleasures even in this world, and lead us at length to that blessed state, where it will be continually excited by unbounded benefits, and exercised and enjoyed through eternity.





O N

H A P P I N E S S.

WHOEVER takes an attentive survey of mankind, cannot fail to be struck with this observation—That, in general, all are roving about in pursuit of enjoyment, and seldom think of seeking it within themselves.

It is very certain that man was formed for society; and it is his duty, as well as interest, to cultivate a social disposition; to endeavour to make himself useful and pleasing to others; to promote and to enjoy their happiness; to encourage the friendly affections, and find in

them the source of the greatest pleasures which this world can bestow. But alas! Society too often exhibits a far different scene. We see weariness and disgust reign in the gayest assemblies.

Conversation, instead of turning upon such subjects as might at once afford amusement and improvement, often languishes for want of materials, or is engrossed by the most trifling subjects, so that it is often merely an idle dissipation of time—perhaps even a pernicious abuse of it; since it may afford opportunities for the exercise of many bad qualities, which, by appearing in disguise, are rendered still more mischievous. Ill-nature shelters itself under the mask of wit. A desire to depreciate the merit of the absent, or perhaps to mortify the present, endeavours to pass itself off for the love of sincerity and truth,

OR

or for a superior degree of zeal in the cause of virtue. Vanity assumes the appearance of every good and amiable quality, as occasion offers; or flatters the weaknesses of others, and applauds what ought to be condemned, in hopes of gaining favour, and being flattered in return. Sometimes merely for want of something to say, and without the least intention of doing mischief, an idle report is repeated, which tends to injure an innocent person—perhaps irreparably; or fix a trifling ridicule upon a worthy character, and thereby destroy the influence of its good example. By these, and numberless other means, conversation is prevented from that purpose for which it was intended; and a meeting of rational beings, which should have contributed to improve the powers of their minds, by mutually assisting each other, and to strengthen the ties of affection and benevolence, by the continual

continual exercise of those qualities, often produces a quite contrary effect; and they part, filled with far different sentiments, and weary and dissatisfied with themselves and with each other.

Many causes might be assigned for this strange, though too frequent abuse of what seems calculated to afford the highest rational entertainment, since every vice and folly contributes towards it; but amongst others, this is certainly one—That mankind often seek society, not with a view to be useful and pleasing to others, or even with any great expectation of being pleased themselves, but merely because they know not how to amuse themselves alone; and those who associate with others, because they are weary of themselves, are not very likely to contribute to the pleasure or advantage of society.

While

While all are in pursuit of happiness, it is strange to observe, that there are so few who cultivate and improve those powers which they possess within themselves; and the consequences of this neglect are certainly much more fatal, even to present happiness, than is generally imagined.

Supposing it were possible, that those who cannot please themselves in solitude should be able to please others, and be happy in society; yet it is impossible to be always engaged in it: and even those who have the greatest opportunities of enjoying it, know not how soon they may be reduced to a state of solitude. It is therefore highly necessary for all, to provide themselves with solitary pleasures; for the mind of man is naturally active; it wants employment and amusement, and if it be not supplied with such as are innocent and useful,

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it will be apt to sink into a state of languor and disgust, or run astray into the wildest extravagancies of fancy, which may lead insensibly into endless doubts and errors, productive of consequences which may prove fatal to happiness both here and hereafter.

It is therefore certainly a point of importance to all, and especially to those who are entering into life, to cultivate those powers and dispositions of mind which may prove sources of innocent amusement. When these are neglected, they are easily lost; but being exercised, they will continually improve; and if properly directed, they may be productive of much advantage as well as pleasure.

The impression which any object makes upon the mind, often depends much less upon the object itself, than on the disposition of the person

person who receives it, and the light in which he has been accustomed to consider things.

Suppose a large number of persons entering at once into a thick wood:—One will enjoy the refreshing shade; another will complain that it deprives him of the prospect; a third will be employed in observing the various kinds of trees and plants which it contains; a fourth will consider them as the riches of the nation, he will form them in imagination into ships, and suppose them maintaining the empire of the seas, or spreading our commerce round the world; another will think of the money they might produce, he will long for the power of levelling them all with the ground, and carrying the profits to the gaming table:—Perhaps to some it may appear only as a gloomy solitude, which they wish to quit as soon as possible; while others,
struck

struck with the awful scenery of the place, feel their minds elevated by it, and enjoy an exalted kind of pleasure, which can only be felt, but never can be described. Others again consider it merely as the path they must pass through, and go on as fast as they can, without paying the least attention to the objects which surround them. Yet the forest is still the same, and as an object of sense makes the same impression on all; though the emotions excited in the mind may perhaps be different in every one who enters it.

The same will be found to be the case in regard to most of the objects which engage our attention; and though this difference in the impression made by them, depends in some degree on natural disposition, yet certainly it also depends on many circumstances which
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are by no means as independent on ourselves as we are apt to imagine.

One person takes a book merely to pass away the time; another takes it in hopes of gaining admiration afterwards, by displaying the knowledge he has acquired:—the first is tired, the second disappointed; yet perhaps the book was calculated to yield both pleasure and improvement to one who read it with a view to these.

Another reads because it is the fashion, and thinks to acquire the reputation of taste, by admiring what has been admired by those who are esteemed good judges; but his reading must be a task, since his memory, not his feelings and his judgment, must inform him when he is to be pleased, and what he is to commend.

Another

Another takes a contrary method, and thinks he shall shew superior delicacy and penetration by disliking what others approve, and discovering faults which they did not observe: he reads with a resolution not to be pleased, and in this he will certainly succeed; and will not only deprive himself of a present pleasure, but the same disposition will probably be extended to other instances, and by degrees may poison all the sweets of life; for every pleasure in this world must in its own nature be imperfect; and those who accustom themselves to seek for something to find fault with, will acquire an habit of viewing the dark side of every thing, till they lose the power of enjoying any pleasure, and the whole world can afford them nothing but objects of dislike.

We may be amused for a time with what only strikes the senses, or engages the attention,

tion. A fine picture, a beautiful prospect, a melodious voice, an entertaining history, can hardly fail to afford some pleasure to every one; but they will make a flight impression on those who have never cultivated a taste for such things; for any pleasure in which the mind is merely passive, can afford only a transient satisfaction; but when the object presented to us (of whatever kind it may be) awakens the imagination, and calls the powers of the mind into action, it may then be really enjoyed, and may lead to pleasures far beyond what at first sight it seemed calculated to produce, by exciting new sentiments and reflections, and exercising and improving those faculties on which our enjoyments so much depend.

There is a certain indolence of mind in many persons, which is no less prejudicial to
their

their happiness than to their improvement; they will not be at the trouble of seeking for pleasures in their own stores, or of contributing their part to the enjoyment of those which are presented to them, but run continually from one object to another, and spend their lives in a fruitless pursuit of what, by the help of a little exertion, they might have found in numberless instances which they have overlooked; and what, in fact, they never can enjoy, while they consider it as totally independent on themselves.

It is owing to this that we see all places of public amusement so much frequented by persons who appear to take no pleasure in them. They cannot amuse themselves, and therefore they go where they are told amusement will be provided for them; and though they feel themselves disappointed, they are
unwilling

unwilling to own it either to themselves or others, for they know no remedy, nor will they be at the trouble of seeking any. This gives an air of gloominess to every place of amusement, for even the gayest scenes cannot afford pleasure to those who do not bring with them a disposition to be pleased themselves, and to enjoy and endeavour to promote the pleasure of others.

It has been observed, that pain would be a trifle, could we banish memory and anticipation, and feel only that of the present moment: the same will be found true in regard to pleasure. We must reflect, in order to suffer or enjoy in any great degree. The pleasure which drives away thought will be felt only for the moment, and will leave a vacancy of mind behind it, which will soon lead to that state of distaste and weariness so contrary to

every real enjoyment, and often more difficult to support than even positive sufferings.

This is true, not only of trifling amusements, but even of those of a more exalted kind. Reflection is necessary to the enjoyment of all; and therefore to acquire an habit of it, is a point of the utmost importance to happiness in every situation in life; yet it is a point much too little attended to, in most systems of education.

Instruction (according to the usual method) consists in exercising the memory, while the other powers of the mind are neglected, and either become totally inactive, or else run wild into a thousand extravagancies, and prove the most fatal enemies to that happiness which they were intended to promote; in order to which, it is necessary that they
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should be cultivated and improved, and directed to proper objects, not lost for want of exertion, nor suppressed from a fear of the mischiefs they may occasion.

The best book, or the most instructive conversation, will afford little pleasure or advantage, by being merely remembered, in comparison of what it might afford by exciting new reflections in the mind, which lead to a new train of thought, and make the riches of others become in some sort its own. Without this, every kind of study will be dull and uninteresting, because it will only fill the memory, without improving the mind, or affecting the heart.

A new language will only furnish a new set of words; but by comparing it with those already known, we might find means of

explaining our sentiments and ideas more distinctly, and perhaps of setting things in a clearer light, even to ourselves.

The study of any branch of philosophy, instead of being merely an employment for the memory, may tend to new observations and discoveries, and raise the mind by degrees to contemplations of a far higher kind.

History, instead of supplying us only with the knowledge of facts, may give us a farther insight into the human heart, and furnish many useful observations in regard to our conduct in life, if we accustom ourselves to seek the remote causes of great events, and trace to their source the secret springs of action, which will often be found far different from what at first sight they appear to have been.

Poetry,

Poetry, from a trifling amusement, may be raised to a pleasure of the highest kind, if it makes us feel more strongly the exalted sentiments which it expresses, and elevates the mind to a contemplation of its native dignity, and a consciousness of powers for enjoyment beyond what any thing in this world can satisfy.

By such methods as these, some kind of improvement may be found in almost every study, besides that which is its immediate object; and a consciousness of improvement is a never-failing source of pleasure.

The same method might also often be applied to the common occurrences of private life. Whenever improvement is really the object of pursuit, numberless opportunities for attaining it (too generally overlooked) will

be continually presenting themselves; and it is astonishing to observe how often such opportunities are lost, from mere inattention, and for want of being accustomed to look within ourselves. Those who are continually employed in endeavouring to display their talents to others, will scarce ever do this to any purpose; their attention is engaged by what they wish to appear to be, not by what they really are: and this is often carried so far, that they impose upon themselves as well as others; and while this deception continues the evil is without a remedy, and all hope of improvement must be entirely at a stand.

There is indeed hardly any thing so fatal to improvement of every kind, as the practice which too generally prevails in the world, of substituting appearances in the place of realities; and those instructions which teach the
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art of doing this, (however plausible they may appear in many instances) will be found to be far more pernicious than at first sight would be imagined, not only by setting up another object of pursuit, in the place of real improvement, and teaching a continual habit of deceit, but also by bringing true merit, into discredit. Those who are conscious that they are acting a part themselves, will always be apt to suspect others of doing the like; and those who can find means of acquiring the reputation of merit of any kind, which they do not possess, will hardly be at the trouble afterwards of endeavouring to acquire the reality.

In solitude, there is much less danger of self-deceit. Our thoughts are not dissipated by a variety of objects, nor employed in endeavouring to gain the good opinion of others;

others; nor is the judgment we form of ourselves made dependent on that opinion, as it sometimes happens in society, especially when we have any reason to believe that it inclines to the side most favourable to our vanity. We must then feel and improve those powers which we possess, in order to enjoy them; and for this reason, as well as many others, it may be highly useful to all, to be sometimes accustomed to solitude; especially in the early part of life, while the mind enjoys its full vigour, and the spirits are not broken by sickness and afflictions; they will then find the resources which they possess, and learn that it is possible to amuse and improve themselves.

Probably a time will come when solitude will be unavoidable, or when, from distaste to society or many other causes, it may appear desirable.

desirable. But to those who have never been accustomed to enjoy the pleasures and advantages it might afford, it will then (in all probability) be a painful and dangerous situation. Unconscious of those resources which they might have found within themselves, and unaccustomed to intellectual pleasures, they will hardly be able to acquire a relish for them at a time when the spirits, and perhaps the temper, are impaired by the disappointments and mortifications of society. They will be apt to dwell on discontented thoughts, and fancy themselves better than the rest of the world, merely because they are weary of it, till their benevolence is weakened by continually viewing every thing in the worst light, and they grow proud of the faults of others, not of their own good qualities.

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In such a state of mind, no advantage will be gained by being obliged to take a nearer view of their own character and conduct; for instead of comparing themselves with that degree of excellence which they might have attained, they will form their judgment by a comparison of themselves with the unfavourable opinion they have formed of others; and their ill-humour, as well as their vanity, will secure to themselves the preference, yet will deprive them at the same time of any satisfaction this preference might afford; for their ill-humour will make them a burden to themselves, and their vanity will make them eager to gain the applause of others, and be continually mortified and disappointed at finding they do not succeed. Thus the gloom of solitude will be added to the disgusts of society; the pleasures of the one will be lost, and those of the other unknown or unenjoyed.

It

It is impossible to enumerate the pleasures which a thinking mind may find within itself, or the advantages which may be derived from them; they are far beyond all description, and can only be known by being enjoyed. Indeed from a difference of character and circumstances, they may perhaps be different in every person; but every one who seeks them, will probably find that he may enjoy much more than he had any notion of.

How delightful might it be to trace to ourselves the image of all that is most beautiful and pleasing in nature, to renew the impression which such objects have formerly made upon the mind, and then endeavour to improve in imagination upon what we have seen. To observe the causes of those effects which we see, as far as they are obvious to our notice, and try to discover those which are yet
unknown

unknown to us;—to recal such past events as have afforded us true pleasure, and to anticipate such as we may hereafter hope for, or paint to ourselves scenes more pleasing than any we have ever yet known, or probably shall ever find in this world;—to soar beyond all bounds of space or time, and try to catch a glance at objects which are far beyond our present powers of comprehension;—in short, to exert the powers of the mind, to enjoy and improve those faculties by which man is distinguished from the inferior creation; to feel that they are independent on outward objects, and rejoice in the consciousness of the dignity of our nature.

Every amiable quality and disposition of the heart; all that is good and pleasing in society; may also, in a certain degree, be exercised in imagination, and cultivated and enjoyed in solitude.

Our gratitude may be employed, in recollecting the kindneſſes we have received ; we may ſtill dwell with pleaſure on the ſentiments they excite, though deprived of the power of expreſſing them.

Our humility may be exerciſed, by taking a nearer view of our own imperfections, undiſguiſed by that falſe colouring which our paſſions are apt to throw over them, while we are engaged in ſociety ; yet at the ſame time, the ſenſe of our own weakneſs teaches us to be more indulgent to that of others.

Our candour may be employed, in driving away the prejudices through which we are apt to view their words and actions, when they happen to wound our pride, or oppoſe our purſuits. While we feel ourſelves hurt, we are apt to aggravate the fault of the offender,

offender, which perhaps, if considered in its true light, and ascribed to its true motives, would appear to be no fault at all.

Our benevolence may be exerted, in contriving schemes to do good to others, which, even though they should never take effect, will still afford a pleasing exercise to the mind, and contribute to preserve that heavenly disposition in its full vigour, and make us more ready to pursue and embrace all such opportunities as may afterwards be found.

Thus every virtue may, in some sort, be exercised, even when all the apparent means of exercising them are taken away; for our thoughts may still be employed in considering in what manner we would wish to act, in various circumstances and situations; and by such means as these, we may improve ourselves

selfes in every thing that is good and valuable, and enjoy, in some degree, the good effects of actions which it may never be in our power to perform.

While the thoughts acquire an habit of viewing things in their true light, the pleasures of goodness are felt, and the conduct it would dictate, is impressed on the heart, and may remain ready to be called forth to action on future occasions, in spite of the opposition which present objects and passions may then make to it.

What improvement as well as satisfaction may it afford us, to form to ourselves the most exalted representation of every virtue—free from every human frailty and imperfection, and raised far beyond what we have found in real life ;—to contemplate them in
their

their greatest excellence;—to feel our minds elevated, and our hearts warmed by the representation, while our most earnest desires are excited to attain to that perfection which we admire; and every difficulty which can oppose our efforts, and every suffering which may attend them, appear trifling on the comparison, and unworthy of the attention of an immortal mind. Then to consider the great and glorious purposes for which that mind was intended; the joys which alone can satisfy it; the extent of its powers; and the eternity of its duration!

In such contemplations as these, the soul seems to expand itself, and enjoy its native excellence; it feels itself raised above the little objects of this world, and seems to make some approach to that happiness for which it was formed, and which even in the midst
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of all that present enjoyments can bestow, and in spite of a thousand disappointments, it must for ever pursue; while the powers and the hopes it feels, afford an earnest of joys which are calculated to satisfy them—for surely they were not given in vain.





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CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

THERE is no precept in the Gospel of our Blessed Saviour delivered more positively than this, "BE YE PERFECT." It is addressed to all, no exception is made in favour of any, and GOD does not require from us what we are unable to perform; yet when we consider the various talents bestowed upon mankind, and the different situations in which we are placed in this world, it seems scarce possible that all should attain to an equal degree of excellence. The powers and faculties of many are confined, the influence of most men extends but to a very small circle;

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and while they admire at a distance the virtues of those who have moved in a more exalted sphere, and by their actions or sufferings have benefited mankind, and done honour to the religion they profess, they are apt to imagine that as these are heights of excellence to which they never can attain, those precepts which seem to require such exalted perfection cannot relate to them; that to aim at it would be attempting an impossibility; and that such endeavours must be left to those whose powers are greater, and whose influence is more extensive. Yet the precept is general, and therefore certainly cannot relate to any thing that is only in the power of a few.

What then is this Perfection which is thus required of all, and which therefore certainly may be attained by the poor and dependant, the sick and helpless, as well as by the healthy
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and powerful, the rich and happy?—Perfection, in any created being, must mean the highest degree of excellence which that being is capable of attaining; absolute perfection, in the strictest sense of the word, being an essential attribute of God alone. It must consist in the utmost exertion of those powers with which that being has been endued by his Maker, and in applying them all to the best purposes. But as the powers given to every different order of being, and probably to every individual, are different; the degree of excellence which constitutes the perfection of every one, must also be different; and one who has exerted his little talents to the utmost, may be much nearer to perfection, than another in appearance greatly superior to him in excellence, but who had talents to have made him much more so, if he had employed them as he ought.

This must always occasion great uncertainty in the judgments we form of others, since we can never know the powers with which they are endued, nor the difficulties with which they are obliged to struggle, and therefore can never judge how near they may have advanced to that perfection which it was in their power to attain. Perhaps the fault we think we have discovered in our neighbour, may have arisen from some motive unknown to us, which, in the eye of Him who sees the heart, may greatly lessen its malignity. Perhaps, through ignorance or prejudice, it may appear to him in a very different light. Such considerations should make us very cautious in the judgments we pass upon others, and always inclined to hope the best, and to give the most favourable interpretation to every action; since, for ought we know, it may be the most just.

But

But with regard to ourselves, the case is far different, and we are by no means liable to the same difficulties; since the fault we *see*, we certainly may endeavour to amend; and if that endeavour be sincere, we may be certain that it will be assisted and accepted.

Some good we can all do; and if we do all that is in our power, however little that power may be, we have performed our part, and may be as near perfection as those whose influence extends over kingdoms, and whose good actions are felt and applauded by thousands. But then we must be sure that we do *all* we can, and exert to the utmost all those powers which God has given us; and this is a point in which we are very apt to deceive ourselves, and to shelter our indolence under the pretence of inability.

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Let us then, in whatever situation in life we may be placed, consider attentively how we may improve it to the best advantage; let us never be discouraged by any difficulty which may attend what we know to be our duty; for if we do our best, we are secure of an All-powerful assistance; nor let us ever think any occasion too trifling for the exertion of our best endeavours, for it is by constantly aiming at perfection in every instance, that we may at length attain to as great a degree of it as our present state will admit of.

Thus we may fulfil our Blessed Saviour's command, in the meanest as well as in the most exalted situation in this world; and upon an attentive survey of every one, we may discover duties sufficient to require the exertion of our utmost powers, and many opportunities of doing good to ourselves and others, which
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are apt to escape the eye of a superficial observer. And in that day when GOD shall judge the secrets of men's hearts, we shall probably see many, who have scarce been noticed in this world, distinguished amongst the most illustrious followers of their LORD, and preferred far before others, who while they lived were the general objects of reverence and admiration.

The poor man, weakened perhaps by sickness, and dejected by contempt, whose daily labours can hardly procure him a little pittance to support his wretched life, cannot indeed distinguish himself by any great actions or public benefits; he cannot feed the hungry, nor clothe the naked; but he can submit with patience and resignation to that state in which Providence has placed him; he can labour with integrity and diligence to improve

prove it to the best advantage, and look up to GOD for a blessing upon his honest endeavours; he can instruct his children in all the good he knows, and be always ready to take every opportunity to assist a neighbour in distress; and in so doing he may approve himself to the Searcher of Hearts, far more than those who perhaps have inwardly applauded their own benevolence, when they bestowed a trifle out of their superfluity to give a temporary relief to his distress. He may rise to a still more heroic degree of excellence, and lift up a secret prayer for the man who has refused him even that trifle; yet none will hear that prayer, but HE to whom it is addressed. Contempt, or at best pity, will be his portion in this life; and probably it will never occur to any one who sees him, that he shall hereafter behold him with admiration and reverence—perhaps with envy.

Let

Let not then the meanest imagine he can do nothing; he may be truly great, he may fulfil his LORD's command, and be secure of his acceptance; but let him remember, that every advantage must be gained by some effort, and that no situation can justify indolence and inactivity, or murmuring and repining. And let those who see his distress, but cannot see his heart, think in what manner they shall wish they had treated him, if they should see him hereafter approved and rewarded by the great Judge of men and of angels.

But poverty is not the only situation which is pleaded as an excuse for the little good that is done; there are many who live dependant on the will of others, so that even their time is not at their own disposal. When this is really the case, and, from the relation in which
they

they stand, such a dependance is indeed their duty, then a cheerful submission is the virtue which their situation particularly requires; and a little experience will soon convince them that it is not one of those which is most easily attained: their own inclinations, even when just and reasonable, must often be sacrificed to the mere whims of another, and it will require no small degree of exertion to be able to gain continual victories over themselves.

Let not those who are placed in such a situation imagine, that they can do nothing, for they have much to do; their task is difficult and painful; and the more so, as they must not expect to be supported in it by the approbation of others, since in general the more perfect their virtue, the less it will be noticed; they will not tell the world that it
costs

costs them a continual struggle, and probably the world will never suspect it; but on the contrary, they will often be blamed for actions, which, if their true motives were known, would appear most deserving of applause.

Something of this sort may probably have been felt at times by all whose situation is in any degree dependant; but that dependance can never be so continual as to deprive them of all opportunities of acting for themselves, and benefiting others; and when such opportunities are rare, that consideration should incite them to exert the utmost diligence in seeking them out, and activity in making the most of them.

The same may be said in regard to all who complain in any respect of the narrow sphere in which they are confined. Let them examine

amine it attentively, and constantly and diligently exert their utmost powers in doing all the good they can, and they will soon find that much more is in their power than they were apt at first sight to imagine; and this, not only by relieving the distreffes of poverty and want, by being always ready to give comfort to the afflicted, and advice and instruction to those who stand in need of them; but common conversation, and daily intercourse with the world, afford numberless opportunities of doing good, to those who are attentive to make the most of them.

A word in season may save the blush of bashful merit, oppressed by the torrent of ridicule, or stop the progress of a report, repeated perhaps only from mere thoughtlessness, but which yet, when repeated a little farther, might stain the reputation of real worth.

A gentle

A gentle answer may stop the violence of passion in its beginning, which a hasty word, and perhaps even silence, might have aggravated, till the consequences became dreadful indeed.

To relate the distresses of those who cannot plead for themselves, may awaken the compassion of some who are able to relieve them, and perhaps not unwilling, but too indolent, or too much engaged in other pursuits, to seek out objects for themselves; nay, sometimes, if the application be made in public, it may gain from vanity what it would not have gained from benevolence; and by these means the poor at least will be benefited, and possibly the rich may be so too; for those who have been induced to do good, though by a wrong motive, may yet find that there is a pleasure in it, and learn in time to love it for its own sake.

A judicious

A judicious observation, a rational maxim, a generous sentiment, when unaffectedly introduced in the course of conversation, may make an impression on those who are not in the habit of thinking for themselves.

A thousand little attentions may exercise our own benevolence, and gain the good-will of others; perhaps too they may contribute in some degree to soothe the aching heart; for even the most trifling instance of kindness, which springs from true benevolence, can hardly fail of giving some pleasure to the receiver.

But it is impossible to enumerate the opportunities of doing good, which are continually offering themselves in the daily occurrences of life, in such things as are commonly called *little*; though indeed that appellation by no means

means belongs to them, since it is upon these principally that the happiness of society depends; and a want of attention to them is the source of continual uneasiness, and the chief cause of most of the unhappiness which disturbs the intercourse of private life.

The man of delicate sensibility, whose heart has received an unnecessary wound, has been more hurt by the person that gave it, than by him who robbed him of his purse; and yet how often is this done without the least remorse, merely from the idle vanity of displaying a false wit, or a trifling talent for ridicule; or from a desire of assuming a superiority which is seldom assumed but by those who have no title to it.

Opportunities of giving pain are continually presenting themselves; and to avoid

them is as much a positive duty, as to seek opportunities of doing good: both are alike the genuine effects of true benevolence, which perhaps shews itself in a still stronger light when it triumphs over vanity, by suppressing an ill-natured display of wit, than when it bestows a relief to the distressed; since, in this last instance, the pleasure attending on the action might alone be a sufficient inducement to it.

But while we are endeavouring to avoid giving pain to others, we should not be less cautious to guard against a disposition to take offence at every trifle, which is not less prejudicial to the pleasures and advantages of society. A want of delicacy, or perhaps merely a want of thought, may have given rise to the expression which displeases us; and if so, we have no more right to be offended, than

than we have when we suffer any harm by mere accident; since, in either of these cases, there certainly was no intention to hurt us. Such excuses as these we may often find reason to plead for others, but we can never plead them in our own case, if we indulge ourselves in the slightest word or look that may give pain to another; since the first is what nobody will own, and a consciousness of the last would be a contradiction in terms. Thus reason and justice, as well as benevolence, and a regard for the good of society, require us to make great allowance for others, and very little for ourselves.

It may possibly be objected, that all this requires an uncommon degree of reflection and presence of mind; that such continual watchfulness must restrain the freedom of conversation; and that it is impossible to

be always upon our guard. But such objections seem to suppose a continual struggle with a bad heart; whereas he who aims at perfection, must begin his business there; for while any bad dispositions are encouraged, it is vain to hope that they will not sometimes shew themselves in words and actions; and it would be a difficult task indeed, always to put on the appearance of benevolence, while the reality is wanting. But were the heart full of love and gratitude to its Creator, and true benevolence to its fellow-creatures, it would find in itself the source of all that is good and pleasing in society, and then there would be nothing more to do but to follow its dictates.

To attain to this perfection, and to conquer all those selfish passions which oppose it, should be our constant aim, and must indeed
often

often require the exertion of no small effort; but it is an object well worthy to employ our utmost powers, and it may be observed for our comfort, that at every step the difficulties will lessen; the heart will feel the *pleasure* of benevolence, while reason and religion recommend the *duty*: every opportunity of exercising it will increase this pleasure, and consequently the passions will become less and less able to contend with it, till at last they are obliged to yield, not so much to reason as to a stronger inclination; and then the exercise of benevolence becomes, not the result of reflection, but an indulgence of the bent and inclination of the heart.

To one of this character, it would require no effort to avoid giving pain to others, since it would be the greatest pain he could himself receive. The little vanity of displaying

a superiority, or gaining a momentary applause, could be no inducement to him, since the feelings of his own heart would make him blush while he received it, from a consciousness that he might have deserved applause of a much higher kind.

In short, to say that the exercise of this branch of benevolence, which relates to the little occurrences of common conversation, must lay us under a continual restraint, is in effect to say, that some other inclination is more powerful in the heart; and while that is cherished and encouraged, it is vain to hope that it will not prevail, and perhaps in time quite extinguish that heavenly spark, which, properly cultivated, might have been a source of happiness to ourselves and others. To improve this should be the constant business of every one, in every different situation in
life;

life; for though its exercises are various, and though in this world they cannot always afford an equal degree of pleasure, yet the principle from which they all flow is still the same; and it is the principle which should be cultivated and improved here, and which will be accepted and rewarded hereafter.

There is yet another situation, which, more than all those hitherto mentioned, seems to damp all the powers of the soul, and exclude all means of doing good to ourselves or others, and that is Sickness.

When the body is weakened by pain, the thoughts confused, and the spirits sunk, we are apt to think it is no time to aim at perfection, and that we are incapable of making any effort towards it: yet even here we should remember, what has been all along observed,
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that the perfection required of us consists in exerting to the utmost those powers which we possess, however little they may be. In such a state, we cannot indeed act as we would have done in the days of health and strength, but we can still constantly and sincerely endeavour to do our best.

In this, as in every other situation, we should remember, that to avoid giving pain is as much an act of benevolence as to do real good. An impatient word, or even a groan, may wound the heart of the friend who has been watching night and day to give you ease and comfort: suppress it, and you will have prevented a pang, greater perhaps than that which you relieve when you give bread to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty. An expression of fretfulness at the little inadvertencies of attendants may discourage well-

well-meant endeavours, while a different conduct might still incite them to do more, and possibly in time might teach those, who at first were guided merely by interest, to act upon a better motive.

Such opportunities of doing good may yet be found; and if such exertions are attended with some difficulty, let us remember, that to conquer that difficulty is a chief part of the perfection which such a state admits of.

True Christian fortitude and patience must be founded on a sincere love of GOD, and an affectionate, filial resignation to his will; and such a disposition must necessarily include benevolence towards all mankind, an *active* principle which pain and sickness never can extinguish.

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Let us not then imagine that excess of suffering can be an excuse, if we are conscious that we give any pain to others, which might have been avoided; since it can only be so, for those who are not conscious of it, when it forces from their weakness expressions which they afterwards recollect with pain, and wish they could recal; for it must be allowed, that in such a situation it is difficult to be always upon our guard.

But though this give reason to hope that great allowances will be made, yet it can be no excuse for not exerting our best endeavours; and it is a very powerful motive to induce us to cultivate, whilst we are in health, that heavenly benevolence, which, were it once, as it ought to be, the habitual disposition of the soul, would remain so in every situation in life, and find continual opportunities of exerting

exerting itself, even in the midst of pain and sickness, of poverty and affliction.

It would be endless to enumerate the variety of situations in which inability to do good is pleaded as an excuse for the little that is done, and that not always by the indolent alone: for there reigns in the world a certain prejudice in favour of such actions as are attended with apparent good effects, which it is very difficult for any one entirely to shake off: and it may have happened to many, whose intentions were yet sincerely good, to be discouraged by the little apparent good that is in their power, and by the disappointments they may have met with in their endeavours to do even that little.

But let such remember, that it is the intention, not the success, which constitutes
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the merit of any action; and whatever present pleasure they may lose by the disappointment of their honest endeavours, will, with infinite advantage, be made up to them hereafter.

They should also consider, that the applause of man, and even the secret self-approbation which attends a successful good action, is not without its danger. Vanity is ever apt to steal in, and taint even our best performances, and that not only in such actions as are seen by the world, for there may be a vanity even in our own applause: and when they find their best endeavours disappointed, and their greatest kindnesses received with indifference and repaid with ingratitude, let them not be discouraged, but still go on in the blessed course in which they are engaged, constantly endeavouring to discover and improve every oppor-

opportunity of doing good, however little it may appear, though no eye see them, and no voice applaud them.

HE who is higher than the highest, will mark their diligence, and crown hereafter their sincere endeavours, though he may see fit to humble them with disappointments here, and deprive them of the satisfaction of enjoying the good they do.

Indeed such disappointments, if rightly used, will serve to improve, and secure their virtues, by exalting them above the influence of all meaner motives, and teaching them to exert their utmost endeavours, not with a view to any present enjoyment, but with a sincere and earnest desire to please Him who will not fail to accept and bless an unwearied perseverance in well-doing.

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It may also be observed, for their comfort and encouragement, that we are very bad judges of the success of our endeavours; and if we do not immediately perceive any good effect from them, we have no reason from thence to conclude that they will have none.

You have been endeavouring perhaps to comfort the afflicted, and you have been heard without attention, or even with impatience; yet be not discouraged: a little reflection may give weight to what you have said, and a perseverance in the friendly endeavour may in time make an impression upon the heart, and recal it in some degree to a sense of pleasure: for surely no one can be so entirely overwhelmed with grief, as to receive no pleasure from the expressions of real kindness, or to be quite insensible to that tender, unwearied attention to give ease and
comfort,

comfort, which flows from an affectionate and benevolent heart: and when the mind is once awakened from the lethargy of grief, it will by degrees become more composed, and be capable of listening to the comforts of Reason and Religion.

You have, it may be, been giving some good advice, which in appearance produced no other effect than that of displeasing the person to whom it was addressed; yet you know not what impression it may have made. Our pride is apt to rise at first against the very thought of being advised; yet if the advice were given in such a manner as shewed it to be the effect of real kindness and good-will, not of any desire of assuming a superiority, it may probably be remembered and examined afterwards. Reason may approve what pride at first rejected, and the advice
may

may have its weight, though the person who gave it may never be informed of his success.

The same observation might be made in many other instances; and whoever sincerely endeavours to do all the good he can, will probably do much more than he imagines, or will ever know, till the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest.

To decline any difficulty which lies in the way of our duty, under pretence of inability to conquer it; to refuse engaging in any good and virtuous undertaking, from a fear that we shall not succeed in it; are certainly the effects of cowardice, not of humility.

We know not our powers till we exert them; and by exertion we may be very certain they will improve; but indolence is glad
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of an excuse, and pride fears the mortification of a defeat; and thus every noble and generous effort is discouraged, and the mind sinks into a state of inactivity, quite opposite to that diligent and ardent endeavour after perfection, which should be the constant business of our lives.

It is by this endeavour that we fulfil the precept of our BLESSED SAVIOUR. We cannot indeed at once attain to perfection, but the attainment of it may be our constant aim, in the smallest as well as in the most important actions of our lives; and that not only in those duties which more immediately belong to our station in the world, but in every instance which may be within our power.

In whatever situation we may be placed, let us not enquire what allowances may be

made for us, nor how much we must do that we may hope for acceptance. But let us consider what is the *best* that we can do; for we certainly have not performed our duty, when we are conscious that we might have done better.

Let us endeavour to impress upon our hearts such a lively sense of the kindness of our Infinite Benefactor, as may prompt us to embrace every opportunity of expressing our love and gratitude towards Him. We shall not then be disposed to confine the circle of our duties; but on the contrary it will be our earnest desire to extend it as far as possible, that we may enjoy, in every instance, the delightful thought of acting for *his* sake, and making the best returns in our power to the infinite obligations we have received.

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This will diffuse a sort of heavenly pleasure over the most trifling circumstances in our lives, since even in these we may still endeavour to do our best, from a desire to please Him; and that desire, we may be very certain, will always be accepted.

If this influence our conduct in the daily occurrences of life, every incident that befalls us will contribute to bring us nearer to perfection, by furnishing a fresh opportunity for the exertion of our utmost endeavours to attain it; every little difficulty we conquer will increase our fortitude; every attempt to do good, even in the smallest instance, will strengthen our benevolence; even the faults we may fall into, though they humble us under the sense of our weakness, yet instead of discouraging, they will serve to excite us to redouble our diligence, since we are certain

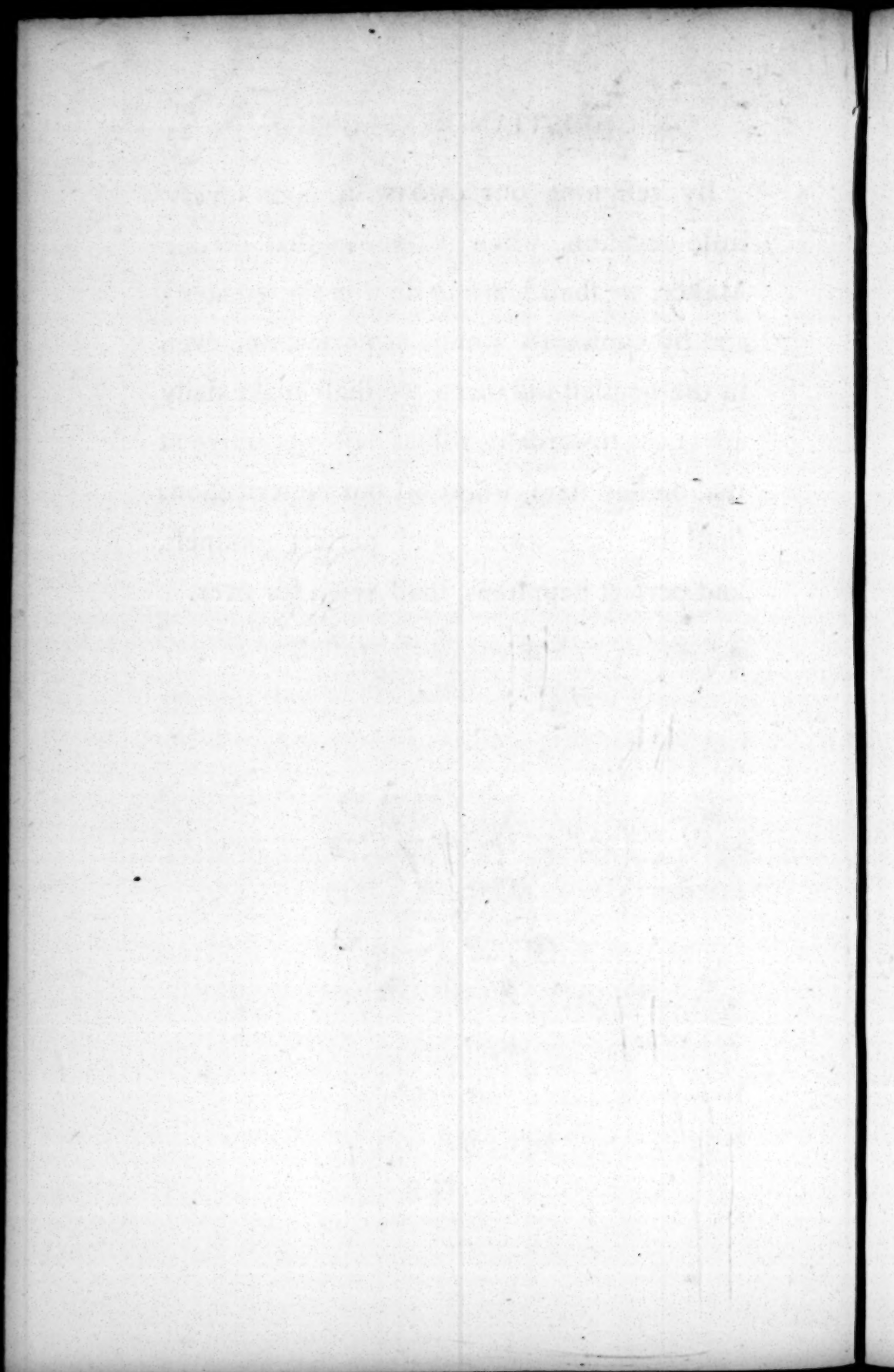
that if we will sincerely endeavour to avoid them for the future, we may depend on the Divine Mercy to assist our weakness, and pardon our imperfections.

The afflictions we may meet with will be brightened by the thought that they are sent by an All-gracious Father, who would not permit them but for our real advantage; and that therefore they certainly may be so, if we make a right use of them. Instead of sinking under them, we shall look up to Him with filial confidence; and, rejoicing in his All-powerful protection and assistance, not only submit without murmuring, but even be thankful for the trial, and constantly endeavour so to receive it, that it may answer the gracious purposes for which it was designed.

By

By resigning our own will, upon every little occasion, when it opposes that of our Maker, we shall learn to do it in the greatest; and by constantly aiming at perfection, even in the smallest instances, we shall make daily advances towards it, till at last we arrive at that blessed state, where all our imperfections shall be done away; and perfect goodness, and perfect happiness, shall reign for ever.







O N

R E S I G N A T I O N.

RESIGNATION is a constant habitual disposition of mind, by which the true Christian is prepared to give up his own inclination in every instance, whether great or small, whenever the will of God requires that he should do so.

To submit with patience to what we cannot avoid, and resign with cheerfulness what we cannot keep, has been the advice of the wise in every age; but without some motive
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to enable us to do so, such lessons generally produce little effect.

To make the best of evils for which we can discover no remedy, and no consolation, is a painful effort, which often wears out the spirits it pretends to support.

Religion alone can enable us to practise that resignation which it requires, and to practise it in every instance; for we are much too apt to deceive ourselves by a false kind of resignation, which is exerted only on particular occasions, and which in fact is often nothing more than the sacrifice of one inclination to another that is more dear to us; and he who has resigned an empire, may be as far from that resignation of the *will* which the Christian Religion requires, as he who has usurped one; and he may be as easily overcome

overcome by the little trials which continually arise in common life.

True Resignation must be founded on a principle which never can be shaken; it must be a real sentiment of the heart, inspired by a motive sufficient to excite and to support it; and this can be no other than a sincere love of God, and that from a confidence which is inspired by the consideration that all events are in the hands of Him whose wisdom and goodness are infinite as his power.

No comfort can spring from the thought that the evils we suffer are unavoidable; and the unwilling submission, which yields to a power it is unable to resist, is far unlike the true resignation of a Christian. An apparent calm may, in the one instance, disguise the secret murmurs of the heart, or perhaps a
painful

painful effort may compel the violence of passion to give place to the stillness of despair; but in the other, the stroke, however deeply felt, is yet willingly endured; and a firm and affectionate confidence, which no affliction can remove, inspires that sincere resignation, which triumphs over the feelings of nature, though it cannot destroy them, and always rejoices in the thought that an Almighty Friend will dispose all events as shall be most for the real interest of those who truly love Him and depend upon Him, however painful their trials may at present appear.

The effects of this resignation are not only a peace, which grief itself cannot take away, and a constant readiness to submit to every dispensation of Providence, but also an active and vigorous resolution, which willingly undertakes the most painful exertions, and
performs

performs the task assigned, whatever struggle it may cost. It is always ready to sacrifice whatever is most dearly valued, when the will of GOD requires it, and finds a secret satisfaction even in the most painful exertions, from the consideration of Him for whose sake they are made.

To feel and to enjoy the innocent pleasures which our situation in this world affords, is not only natural, but laudable. The pleasing as well as the painful circumstances in life are intended for our real advantage; and the same disposition of mind, which resigns them readily when the will of GOD requires it, will also enjoy them while He bestows them, and enjoy them with a security which others can never feel; since the thought of their uncertainty (that constant allay to every earthly pleasure) is always attended with a full conviction,

viction, that they will be enjoyed as long as is really best for us, and that an All-powerful assistance will enable us to support their loss.

This then is the distinguishing character of true resignation:—

It does not consist in giving up any particular thing which we loved and valued; it is not a virtue which is only to be called forth to action on extraordinary occasions;—but

It is a constant and settled disposition of mind, ever ready to conform to the will of GOD in every instance; to enjoy the pleasures, or submit to the afflictions which He sends, and to *act* or *suffer*, as the duties of every different situation may require.

It

It is the only sure foundation of patience, fortitude, self-denial, generosity, and all those virtues by which a victory is gained over our own inclinations. Other motives may inspire them in particular instances, but they can never be practised constantly and universally, but by those whose will is sincerely resigned to the will of their Creator.

He who has borne some considerable loss, or great degree of pain, with calm resolution, may grow fretful and uneasy at the little disgusts and mortifications of society. He who has gone through the most difficult trials with that active courage which engages universal admiration, may fear to oppose the current of general practice in trifles, when he thinks he shall be despised for so doing. And he who has denied himself numberless indulgencies to assist the distressed, may yet find it difficult
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to give up his particular fancies and inclinations, however necessary the sacrifice may be.

But none of these things can happen where the heart is sincerely and universally resigned.

The most painful sufferings are patiently endured; the darling inclination is readily and willingly given up, whatever anguish the sacrifice may cost, whenever the Will of God requires it: and when that Will requires sacrifices of another kind, the little comforts, conveniences, and amusements of common life; the kindness which soothed our affliction, or the applause which supported our resolution; every thing, in short, whatever it may be, which we are called upon to resign, is then the object, in regard to which that virtue is to be exercised; and the heart in which that disposition reigns, is equally prepared for all.

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We deceive ourselves greatly, if we imagine that an extraordinary exertion of resignation in one instance may dispense with it in others which appear to us trifling; on the contrary, if ever we find it wanting on those little occasions, we have reason to suspect that the seeming exertion of it in greater matters was in reality owing to some other motive.

Much may be resigned by those who are far indeed from having resigned their will; and the little trials which pass unnoticed by all the world, are often the surest tests of our sincerity, and may be the most useful to subdue our perverse inclinations, and bring us to that state of mind which our duty requires.

That the exertions of this virtue are often painful, cannot be denied. Our duty may require us to make great and voluntary sacrifices

fices which we might have avoided, or to submit to injuries and humiliations which we might have prevented; though even here it is possible, that the indulgence of our inclinations might in the end have been productive of much greater sufferings, than the denial of them. But in general it is exerted in regard to such evils as we cannot prevent; and, according to the observation of Dr. YOUNG,

“ That duty gives up little more
“ Than anguish of the mind.”

It is an act of love and confidence which rests in full security on an all-wise and all-powerful *Friend*; and considered in this view, it is a disposition pleasing in the highest degree, which softens all the miseries of life, and converts the most painful trials into opportunities for expressing sentiments which are always felt with pleasure,—such pleasure as no affliction can ever take away.

The

The sacrifice was perhaps unavoidable; but whether necessity or duty required it, to a heart truly resigned, the case is just the same; in the last, it will indeed be attended with a peculiar satisfaction; but in the first, the manner in which it is received may make it equally a voluntary act. The same sentiments may be expressed, and will most certainly be accepted; the same comforts may soothe our sorrows, and the same assistance will support us under them. Considered in this view, resignation is a state of mind indispensibly necessary to secure our happiness in this world.

It has been the advice of many, that in our happiest days we should consider the uncertainty of the good things we possess; look forward to the time when we must be deprived of them; and prepare ourselves beforehand to support their loss, by anticipating the pain

we shall then feel, and rendering the mind in some sort familiar to it, that we may be better able to sustain the shock when it comes: thus securing to ourselves a certain present pain, in order to lessen one which is future and uncertain. Perhaps it may not produce even this good effect, since dwelling on the thought of sorrows must certainly by degrees wear out the spirits, and render them less able to support them when they come.

True resignation teaches us another method of preparing ourselves for afflictions; and while in every pleasure we feel and enjoy the goodness of an indulgent Father, it rests on Him with full confidence, and is ready to acquiesce in the most painful dispensations which the same goodness shall ordain for us; —it does not anticipate evils, nor allay our pleasures; but it is a disposition of mind
which

which enables us to support the one, and enjoy the other.

Afflictions must come, no efforts can avoid them, or destroy the sense of them; patience may endure them; but patience, where the heart is not resigned, is a continual struggle with ourselves. True resignation alone furnishes us with a sure resource; it submits with sincere and affectionate confidence, and casts all our care on Him who careth for us. It is also conducive to happiness, not only by giving peace and security to our pleasures, and comfort to our afflictions; but also by lessening the number of those afflictions.

An attachment to our own will, is one great source of the sorrows of this life. The heart which is truly resigned, will find no pain or difficulty in many things which to

others would be made matter of real sorrow; it yields easily to the present state of things; complies with the inclinations of others; and gives up its fancies or its pleasures cheerfully and readily, as these are never its principal point in view.

Numberless little compliances are necessary in the daily intercourse of life. To the selfish, these are matter of continual mortification and uneasiness; for a trifle, which opposes the will of those who are accustomed to consider their own will in every thing, becomes a matter of importance; but where resignation is become habitual, such things make little or no impression; they are performed with ease, and even with pleasure.

In order to the attainment of this disposition, it is highly necessary to impress strongly
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upon our minds a deep sense of the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty; of our own blindness and inability to judge what is really best for us, and of the happiness of being in his hands.

Who can look back on his past life, without being sensible, that the disappointment of his wishes has often been a real advantage to him? A very little attention must be sufficient to convince us, how apt we are to be misled by our own passions and prejudices, and how little we know of the consequences of those things which are at present the objects of our hopes and fears. How often has prosperity proved fatal to innocence and virtue, without bringing with it that happiness which it seemed to promise! And how many have been reduced to the painful conclusion, "that all is vanity!" when perhaps it was too

late to begin a new course, and choose "the
" better part."

Could we look into the hearts of those whom the world calls happy, how different should we often find the reality from the appearance! In the midst of prosperity and success, some secret care, the disappointment of some darling wish, or even the languor and disgust which sometimes attend satiety, and destroy the relish of pleasure, may be as real evils, and as destructive of happiness, as those sufferings which are generally the objects of compassion.

We know not what we wish: and the indulgence of our wishes would often prove the source of misery even in this world; but as to what tends most to our improvement in what is truly valuable—the state which is
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most calculated to exercise and improve our virtues, and lead us to eternal happiness, we are still more in the dark.

Not only reason and observation of others, but our own feelings and experience, may convince us of this; and shew us, even at present, that we have great cause to rejoice that all events are in better hands than ours: though this is a truth which will probably be more fully explained to us hereafter, when we can at one view take in the whole series of the events of our lives, and know their consequences.

Convinced of this great truth, let us cultivate those sentiments which it ought to produce,—that love and confidence which such a conviction should inspire; and these will naturally produce true and sincere resignation.

But

But as we are not always in a state of mind to have recourse to a train of reasoning; and even the real sentiments of the heart do not always act with the same force, but may be obscured for a time by passion, and the strong impression of present objects; it is of the utmost consequence to us to endeavour to render every virtue familiar and habitual by continual exercise; and there is none for which more frequent opportunities present themselves, than for this of resignation.

Not a day can pass over us without bringing with it some things which are not exactly what we could wish; and all these, however trifling, may have their use, if we receive them as we ought. All may exercise resignation, and help to keep us in a state of mind prepared for greater trials. The bad effects of the contrary are often evident; for often
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do we see the good-humour of the morning, and consequently the happiness of the day, destroyed by trifles; and if the good effects they might produce, are not as immediately apparent, they are not less real, nor less important.

The habit of submitting to little mortifications, from the best motives, and of endeavouring to improve by them, will insensibly connect those ideas with every mortification; and the happy effects of this may extend to matters of the greatest consequence, and be felt at a time when the mind is too much affected to seek for comforts which are not familiar to it.

But above all, in order to the attainment of true and constant resignation, it is highly necessary to keep up a frequent intercourse
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with Heaven, by the exercises of devotion. We must offer up to God our hopes and wishes, and beg of Him that assistance which alone can support our weakness, and which will never be denied to those who sincerely seek for it.

It is by true devotion, constantly felt and exercised, that true resignation can be fully attained. This furnishes a resource in every sorrow, a support in every trial; and where this is truly felt, the heart may indeed be resigned in regard to the events of this world, since its best affections, its most ardent wishes, are fixed on another.

In the Holy Scriptures we find the necessity and importance, and also the happiness, of this virtue, set forth in the strongest terms. Our Blessed SAVIOUR calls us to take up our
cross

cross and follow him,—to be ready to sacrifice all that is most dear to us, even our own life, if we would be worthy of Him.

The Christian life is represented as a state of warfare, in which we must endure hardships as faithful soldiers, and through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven. At the same time we have the most comfortable assurances of assistance and support, and the most engaging invitations to the performance of this duty.

He who invites us to take his yoke upon us, at the same time assures us, that in so doing we shall find rest to our souls. We are called to cast our burden upon the Lord; we are assured that He will never leave us nor forsake us; that our prayers shall be heard, and under the shadow of his wings we may
rejoice.

rejoice. We are promised assistance which can never fail, and joy which no man can take from us.

And while we are thus invited to resign ourselves to the will of God, and furnished with the most powerful motives to support our resignation, we have at the same time the most perfect pattern of that virtue in Him who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; and who yet came not to do his own will, but was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Such is the lesson that the whole tenor of Scripture inculcates, and such the example by which it is enforced!—Happy they on whom these considerations make their due impression; whose hearts are truly resigned, and who are always prepared for
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the exercise of that virtue on every different occasion!

The exercise of virtue, in many instances, is attended with such pleasures, that even those who are not influenced by a sense of duty and religion, can hardly be insensible to them; though such pleasures are enjoyed in a far higher degree, by those in whom these sentiments prevail. Happy in the thought that their own inclination is then conformed to the will of their Creator, they go "on their way rejoicing" in the good effects of their endeavours; they see distress relieved, and virtue promoted; they give comfort to the afflicted, and advice to the ignorant; and enjoy the innocent pleasures of friendship and society, by making them useful to themselves and others. Their happiness is a kind of foretaste of the happiness
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of heaven—a happiness which angels might partake, and in which they may indulge their inclination without restraint, free from any apprehension of that satiety and disgust which often attend the pleasures of this world, or that remorse by which they are often succeeded.

To such pleasures we are apt to think we can hardly be too much attached; and yet even these we may be called to resign; and to murmur and repine at the loss of them, may be as much an instance of the want of true resignation, as the same would be in any other case.

We think our inclinations were innocent, and even laudable; and this seems in some sort to justify regret at being no longer able to indulge them; but our inclinations can be
innocent

innocent no longer than they are conformable to the will of GOD; any farther attachment to them becomes an attachment to our own will, which it is as much our duty to conquer in this case, as in every other.

We delighted to relieve distress; but we are reduced to poverty, and can enjoy that delight no more:—Another task is now assigned us, and must be performed with the same readiness.

We possessed the power of making those happy with whom by duty and affection we were connected, and our lives were spent in the pleasing and laudable employment:—A change of circumstances has taken that power away; no selfish regret must be so far indulged as to make us neglect the duties which are yet within our power, and become less diligent
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in performing the part allotted to us, because it is less pleasing.

We enjoyed the pleasures of friendship and society, and felt the innocent satisfaction which attends on the exercise and improvement of the benevolent affections;—but friends may be removed from us; we may be reduced to a state of unavoidable solitude, or rendered, by sickness or other circumstances, incapable of contributing to the pleasures of conversation and society, and reduced to give pain, where we most wish to confer happiness. Still the same disposition must remain; still the regret of pleasure lost, of whatever kind that pleasure might be, will be an instance of the want of true resignation, whenever it is indulged so far as to make us in any degree negligent of present duties—for that pleasure is the sacrifice we are then called to make.

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Such sacrifices are difficult and painful indeed; and the loss of innocent and virtuous pleasures must be strongly felt by those whose hearts were disposed to delight in them. While within their reach, it was their duty to enjoy them; and the loss of them is attended with the loss of that self-satisfaction, and even of that improvement of good and amiable dispositions, which was derived from them.

But little do we know, in this frail and imperfect state, what tends most to our improvement; and a situation which appears to us most unfavourable to it, may be such as is really best for us. Such indeed we may be sure it is, when Infinite Wisdom and Goodness has decreed it for us.

The mind of man is naturally active, and the active duties are always the most pleasing.

Life, deprived of these, presents a blank, more difficult to support than even painful exertions which are attended with success and self-approbation. Virtue is then no longer its own reward; for silent suffering, when nothing else is in our power, affords no matter for exultation, but rather for the contrary, from the thought of the uselessness of such a life, which necessity itself seems hardly sufficient to justify.

Here then the importance of that true resignation, which religion inspires, appears in the strongest light, as well as the happiness attending on it. That life which once appeared a blank is such no longer, for our time is still spent in the way most acceptable to our Creator. Had HE required of us "some great thing," some painful and difficult exertion, it would certainly have been

been our duty to have performed it: perhaps we fancy we could have performed it with satisfaction; but are we sure that there would have been no mixture of self-complacence, or even of vanity, in this satisfaction?

Let us try whether we find the same satisfaction in complying with *his* will in other instances. The necessity of our situation points out to us our duty.

If by sickness, the loss of any of our faculties, or any other cause, we are really deprived of the power of employing ourselves in any thing useful, and reduced to a state in which a great part of our time must necessarily be passed in doing nothing, it is then evidently the will of God that it should be so; and we then conform to *his* will by

submitting to it as we ought, as we do by performing the active duties when called to them; and we may still look up to Him with filial confidence, and enjoy those hopes which attend the good and faithful servant, who constantly and diligently performs the part assigned him, whatever that part may be.

Every change of circumstances serves only to vary the task we are called to perform, but should make no change in the disposition of the mind, by which alone we are acceptable in the sight of Him who seeth not as man seeth.

Even in the decay of our faculties by age or sickness, the same disposition must be still preserved. The lively fancy which amused our solitary hours may be lost; the active
spirits

spirits which animated our conduct, and even contributed to the ardour of our devotions, may be impaired; and we may feel (in spite of all our efforts) that the earthly body presseth down the mind.

Perhaps there is hardly any instance in which it is more difficult to preserve a constant and sincere resignation than in this; yet even in this it may be still preserved, and may make our little remaining powers still useful to ourselves, and acceptable to our Creator; still that "peace which passeth all understanding," which nothing in this world can give or take away, may remain in the heart, in the midst of the decay of our bodily and even of our mental powers; and will do so, in a heart which has always been truly resigned to the will of God in every different state.

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To bear the infirmities of age with proper sentiments, is a lesson which should be learnt in youth; not by anticipating evils which perhaps we may never be called to suffer, but by acquiring and exercising that resignation which is necessary in every state, and which, when rendered constant and habitual, will remain in every change of circumstances; though it would be difficult indeed to acquire it in the days of weakness and decline, when the powers of action are in a great measure taken away, when every effort is painful, and when bad habits have been so long rooted as scarcely to be overcome.

O my CREATOR and REDEEMER! whose goodness to me shines forth as strongly in the afflictions Thou art pleased to send me, as in the blessings wherewith thou hast surrounded

rounded me; may I enjoy thy blessings with a cheerful and a grateful heart, yet ever be ready to resign them when it shall be Thy good pleasure to deprive me of them! And when Thou art pleased to prove me with afflictions, may I always receive them with patience and humility; remembering that they are sent by an indulgent Father, who permits them for my good, and who will assist and support me under them.

May I never indulge the least repining or discontented thought; but, fixing my attention on those divine joys which Thou hast prepared for them who truly love Thee, may I ever be ready to resign what I most love and value, when Thou shalt see fit to require it of me; and by a constant endeavour to conform my will to Thine in all the changes of this world, may I at length, through thy
infinite

infinite mercy, arrive at that heavenly kingdom, where Thou wilt crown our sincere, though imperfect obedience, with everlasting and unchangeable felicity!

